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COMMODIFIED ANATOMIES:
DISPOSABLE WOMEN IN POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES OF SEXUAL
TRAFFICKING/ABDUCTION

by

M. LAURA BARBERAN REINARES

Under the direction of Renée Schattelman

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores postcolonial fiction that reflects the structural situation of a genocidal number of third-world women who are being trafficked for sexual purposes from postcolonial countries into the global north—invariably, gender, class and race play a crucial role in their exploitation. Above all, these women share a systemic disposability and invisibility, as the business relies on the victim's illegality and criminality to generate maximum revenues. My research suggests that the presence of these abject women is not only recognized by ideological and repressive state apparatuses on every side of the trafficking scheme (in the form of governments, military establishments, juridical systems, transnational corporations, etc.) but is also understood as necessary for the current neoliberal model to thrive undisturbed by ethical imperatives. Beginning with the turn of the twentieth century, then, I analyze sexual slavery transnationally by looking at James Joyce's "Eveline," Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*,

Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful," Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, concentrating on the political, economic, and social discourses in which the narratives are immersed through the lens of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theory. By interrogating these postcolonial narratives, my project reexamines the sex slave-trafficker-consumer triad in order to determine the effect of each party's presence or absence from the text and the implications in terms of the discourses their representations may tacitly legitimize. At the same time, this work investigates the type of postcolonial stories the West privileges and the reasons, and the subjective role postcolonial theory plays in overcoming subaltern women's exploitation within the current neocolonial context. Overall, I interrogate the role postcolonial literature plays as a means of achieving (or not) social change, analyze the purpose of artists in representing exploitative situations, identify the type of engagement readers have with these characters, and seek to understand audiences' response to such literature. I look at authors who have attempted to discover fruitful avenues of expression for third-world women, who, despite increasingly constituting the bulk of the work force worldwide, continue to be exploited and, in the case of sex trafficking, brutally violated.

INDEX WORDS: James Joyce, Therese Park, Mahasweta Devi, Amma Darko, Chris Abani, Roberto Bolaño, Sex Trafficking, Abduction, Kidnapping, (Forced) Prostitution, Postcolonial, Neocolonial, New Historicism, Capitalism, Anti-capitalism, Development, Transnational, Feminism, Orientalism, Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), White Slavery, Military, Comfort Women, Sex Slaves, Immigration, Femicides, Kamala Kempadoo, Jo Doezema, Kathleen Barry, Donna Hughes, Hugh Kenner, Katherine Mullin, Ivette Trochón, Gerardo Bra, Andrés Carretero, Cynthia Enloe, Cathy Caruth, Anne McClintock, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Chandra Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Fregoso Rosa Linda, J. K. Gibson-Graham, Fredric Jameson

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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2012

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Dedication

To the three wonderful advisers in my committee, for their generosity, immense support, multiple readings, and invaluable suggestions. I want to thank all of you for believing in me and my project. I couldn't have done it without you.

To my family in Argentina, who always supported me from afar and gave me the confidence to pursue and accomplish what I love. To my second family in the US, all the friends who helped me, understood me, and encouraged me throughout.

All of you contributed to make this process of discovery one of the most fruitful moments of my life: in helping me find my voice, you helped me find a vision.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
1 Introduction.....	1
2 James Joyce’s “Eveline” and the Emergence of Global Sex Trafficking in the Early 1900s	24
2.1 Like “a helpless animal”? Like a Cautious Woman	30
2.2 Frankly speaking, “The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you”	33
2.3 Conclusion	54
3 Sex Trafficking, War, and the Military in Therese Park’s <i>A Gift of the Emperor</i>	58
3.1 Camouflaged Procurers: When the Military Runs the Brothel.....	61
3.2 “We were bones to the dogs”: Portrait of a Young Comfort Woman	66
3.3 “Unspeakable things” (Park, <i>A Gift</i> 27): (Not) Representing Rape	73
3.4 Conclusion	78
4 Sex Trafficking, Development, and the National Government in Mahasweta Devi’s “Douloti the Bountiful”	84
4.1 “I was born the year after independence”: Whose?	92
4.2 Sex Trafficking and the National Government: When the Sow Eats her Own Farrow	101
4.3 Conclusion	105
5 Sex Trafficking and the Legal System in Destination Countries in Amma Darko’s <i>Beyond the Horizon</i> and Chris Abani’s <i>Becoming Abigail</i>	109

5.1 Sex Trafficking in Amma Darko's <i>Beyond the Horizon</i> : "...too illegal and too black for any proper job"	115
5.2 Sex Trafficking in Chris Abani's <i>Becoming Abigail</i> : "Imagine how lucky those children are!"	134
5.3 Conclusion	147
6 Sex Trafficking, State Patriarchy, and Transnational Capital in Roberto Bolaño's 2666	151
6.1 The Semantics of Neoliberalism and Subaltern Female Rape	155
6.2 Theorizing Third-world Women in the Neocolonial Context: "A sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world"	170
6.3 Conclusion	179
7 Conclusion.....	183
Works Cited.....	201

1 Introduction

After traveling to a small village in Cambodia, a *New York Times* journalist and a videographer “became slave owners in the twenty-first century in the old fashioned way: [they] paid cash in exchange for two slave girls and a couple of receipts. The girls were then [theirs] to do with as [they] liked” (Kristof, *Half the Sky* 35). To their audiences’ relief, these men only intended to “rescue” the girls from the brothels to prove that sexual slavery exists today and show how easily one can buy a sex slave. The results of their experiment, together with compelling testimonies from once-victimized and now empowered third-world women, are narrated in *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity Worldwide* (2009). Here, Pulitzer-prize winners Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn attempt to bring awareness to sex trafficking and female oppression in the third world, showing concrete avenues for people (a first-world audience, clearly) to help overcome these evils.

Despite its well-intentioned message, Kristof and WuDunn’s book can raise as many questions as presence of the chosen journalists and celebrities endorsing it on its back cover (Angelina Jolie, to name one). Just looking at Jolie’s photograph for the 2011 Louis Vuitton campaign shot in Cambodia—one of the most notorious countries in the world for sexual slavery—can astonish one. The “Core Values” campaign, as it was called, shows the actress sitting barefooted on a typical wooden Cambodian boat, looking pensive with a large Louis Vuitton bag by her side. Admittedly, Jolie will “donate a significant amount” of the money earned, rumored to be ten million dollars, to charities (Badat). While my purpose is not to criticize the actress, who, like our good journalists, obviously wants to “help” the third world, I would like to reflect upon the paradoxes inherent in the Louis Vuitton picture because it exemplifies the type of consumerist “feel-good” philanthropy Slavoj Žižek describes when analyzing the success of the

current capitalist model, while it fails to account for the causal (and crucial) relationship between extreme wealth and extreme poverty.¹ In what can be read as hypocritical marketing strategies, global corporations such as Starbucks, Nike, etc., invite us to consume more because in that very act we are allegedly helping the third world by sharing a (minimum) percentage of our purchase with populations in need. More important, through our purchase/donation, we are implicitly absolving such corporations from the exploitation of third-world people and environments in which they actively participate.

Similarly, Kristof and WuDunn's book praises the efforts of such champions of development and consumerism as the World Bank, Goldman Sachs, or the Nike Foundation for their attempts to overcome gender inequality and help to eradicate sex trafficking (even the Pentagon gets favorable reviews, as the military has understood that "[e]mpowering girls, some in the military, [. . .] would disempower terrorists") (Kristof xx-i). Understandably, Kristof's rescue work assumes this position as "the noblest response" to the atrocities inflicted upon young girls, yet his approach has generated "mixed results" (Thrupkaew 13). In "The Crusade against Sex Trafficking: Do Brothel Raids Help or Hurt the 'Rescued'?" Noy Thrupkaew observes that this type of rescue work "rips [the girls'] lives out of context, so that an approach that might be suitable, if still controversial, in a country with reliable law enforcement and criminal justice systems is applied in a country where those systems are more likely to be part of the problem than the solution" (13). Central to this analysis, Thrupkaew further objects that this rescue policy "skirts the economic and social problems that make recovery so difficult for the 'rescued'" while, critically, it fails "to address the economic inequalities that would replace the rescued girl

¹ In fact, during the current world economic crises that has begun to affect countries in the global North, it is the middle and lower classes that have been most adversely affected, while companies selling luxury items (such as Louis Vuitton, Tiffany's, Porsche, etc.) have reported substantial increases in their sales (see the animation by Mariana Santos featured in the *Guardian* on November 16, 2011).

with another victim” (Thrupkaew 13). With startling shortsightedness, then, Kristof and WuDunn emphasize that “this is *not* a case where we in the West have a responsibility to lead because we’re the source of the problem. Rather, we single out the West because, even though we’re *peripheral* to the slavery, our action is necessary to overcome a horrific evil” [my emphasis] (Kristof 24-5). Although I agree with their passionate impulse to eliminate such “horrific evil” (as evidenced in their book’s carefully documented pages), their rhetoric worries me. The authors seem to encourage their Western audiences to, once again, “take up the white man’s burden” and “rescue brown women from brown men.”²

This work is about these contradictions: about a genocidal number of third-world women trafficked for sexual purposes, whose abject existence benefits ideological and repressive state apparatuses (in the form of national governments, financial enterprises, military establishments, etc.), but whose rights and very presence, paradoxically, have often been erased from such state-sanctioned institutions’ consciousness. When we do hear about trafficked women, the news frequently comes disguised in paternalistic discourse or xenophobic rhetoric that may have little to do with these women’s benefit, but far more with neo-imperialistic economic interests--here I echo Ian Almond’s concern regarding “the manner in which Western hegemonic agendas appropriate feminist/humanitarian concerns to justify their ‘interventions’” (133). Ultimately, in denying or downplaying these women’s subjectivity, the current economic system can continue growing undisturbed by ethical imperatives.

It seems now an understatement to say that Western capitalist economies thrive at the expense of third-world economies, as Western capitalism necessitates vast inequality and thus becomes an active instrument in third world economies’ collapses through regulatory institutions

² I am echoing the British writer Rudyard Kipling and the postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO)—all three dedicated to the promotion of international capitalism with a clear agenda in favor of Western capital. Patriarchy and the worldwide economic configuration, the widening chasm between rich and poor as a result of globalization, have clearly deepened the problem. As Karl Marx predicted in *Das Kapital*, the world is now witnessing a simultaneous polar accumulation of immense wealth and massive misery: “The gap between the first world and the rest,” Sankaran Krishna explains, “has widened since 1820 and has further intensified over the past three decades; this is one of the inescapable realities of the contemporary world” (Krishna 60). The “early nineteenth century,” Krishna asserts, “marked the industrialization of the Western world,” and, since then, the world has become inexorably polarized (Krishna 60). Sheldon X. Zhang, for his part, observes that “[i]ncome disparities between developed and developing countries have widened in recent decades as a result of a globalized economy in which production of goods and market transactions can take place in the most efficient manner” (9). While “efficient” seems a rather evasive word choice in the context of this work, Zhang acknowledges that “[h]alf of the current world population [. . .] lives on less than \$2 a day” (9). The situation is even direr in countries like Mexico, for example, whose economy “was seriously weakened during the financial meltdown of 1994-95” (9). In his analysis, Zhang states that “[a]ccording to the World Bank, half of the 104 million residents in Mexico live in poverty and one-fifth in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1 a day)” (9).

But some are benefiting from this context of utter inequality, and here female sex trafficking comes to the fore. Although trafficking for prostitution is not a new phenomenon, the present macroeconomic context has intensified a problem that especially affects increasing numbers of women in the global South with limited capacity for mobility because of their

structural circumstances. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, devastated economies most adversely affect those at the bottom of society: poor women of color, restricted by their class, gender, and race. From an economic standpoint, then, sex trafficking is not simply a result of poverty, but of gendered economic inequality.

Despite the difficulties of arriving at exact numbers for this “hidden population,” we can confidently say that over two million women and children are trafficked into prostitution around the world annually (probably a conservative estimate), with the compass pointing to the global North as the most frequent final destination (Tanneeru).³ Indeed, to this day, human trafficking remains “the third largest criminal industry [. . .] behind only drugs and firearms trafficking, with profits reaching billions of dollars each year” (Zhang 106). Sociologists have written extensively about this crime, and, thanks to some nongovernmental organizations’ (NGOs’) efforts to raise awareness about trafficking and its consequences, governments have begun to take more consistent action.

From an overview of the most current relevant studies on sex trafficking, we can conclude the following: first, the numbers are staggering and the projections on eradicating it ominous; second, victims are subjected to slavery-like conditions, often undergoing physical and psychological torture and having little or no agency; third, transnational traffic generally originates in so-called third-world, post-colonial, and post-socialist countries, with Western nations standing out as the major destination sites, while movement within third-world countries

³ Current data on modern-day slavery (including trafficking for prostitution, sweatshop labor, etc.) is alarming: “estimates range from about 10 million to 30 million” (Tanneeru). Researchers admit the difficulty of providing exact statistics for sex trafficking because of the crime’s clandestine nature and the understandable reluctance of the victims to come forward due to their fear of traffickers’ retaliation on themselves or their families. It would be virtually impossible to come up with an exact number of sex trafficking victims, though the estimated numbers are certainly depressing.

tends to occur from rural areas to urban centers; and fourth, the exponential revenues and the astounding impunity with which the traffickers operate continue to allow these activities to remain under the radar and proliferate—in fact, “[t]here is every indication that the trafficking industry grows stronger each year, and that the recruitment is widening” (Farr xvii). This trend reveals the need for a better understanding of the way the crime is carried out, since too often police target the victim who, under the law of the host country, becomes an illegal alien involved in prostitution (a criminalized activity), while organizers and consumers often escape practically unaffected, sometimes even protected by their states.

Since as early as the late nineteenth century, governments have tried to fight this crime. The first International Abolitionist Congress took place in Genève in 1887, where for the first time sex trafficking was recognized as an international issue, but it was only much later, in 2000, that the UN formally presented a (still debated) definition of human trafficking in the Palermo Protocol.⁴ This legislation provided a landmark in the fight against sex trafficking because, by defining the crime, it endowed governments with the necessary juridical tools to enforce the laws against traffickers. However, its definition generated controversies around the issue of “consented” and “forced” prostitution, already sparked by the earlier attempt to fight sex trafficking globally through the *International Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking in Persons* of 1949, which called on governments to “suppress not only trafficking but also

⁴ In the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (often referred to as the Palermo Protocol), Article 3 stipulates that

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (2)

prostitution, regardless of whether or not they occur with the consent of the women involved” (qtd. in Zhang 107). Women’s “consent” is thus addressed by these international codes more or less specifically, but both of them deem it irrelevant. Predictably, this has divided the waters between feminists in favor of granting official recognition and rights to prostitutes, considering prostitution a chosen form of labor that should be respected (Kamala Kempadoo, Jo Doezema), and abolitionists who regard prostitution as a violation of human rights and, therefore, not a real choice since, according to them, all prostitution is “trafficking” (Kathleen Barry, Donna Hughes).⁵

In a clear case of “divide and conquer,” such disagreement negatively affected every side of the debate, separating the “bad” woman (voluntary prostitute) who needs to be reformed from the “good” woman (coerced sex slave) who needs to be rescued, while it lowered the status of trafficked women even more because it created legal gaps that ultimately benefited traffickers and consumers at the expense of victims. Elina Penttinen explains that within the prostitution/trafficking discourse, women who prostitute themselves to obtain money to buy drugs become “drug addicts,” just like “trafficked women or foreign prostitutes who sell sex because of economic necessity would not count as prostitutes as they do it out of necessity and not professionally,” unlike career prostitutes who “fight for social recognition of their

⁵ Sheldon X. Zhang observes that during the early twentieth century, feminists played a key role in “lobbying government agencies in the Western countries to abolish brothels and all forms of prostitution. Their successful political activism eventually tied prostitution to trafficking and subsequently led to the passage of the United Nations’ *International Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking in Persons* in 1949” (107). Later, a new wave of feminists understood prostitution as an option of “survival taken by women” that shouldn’t be penalized (107).

For further clarification on the prostitution/trafficking divide from a pro-prostitution perspective, see *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work and Human Rights* edited by Kamala Kempadoo and *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* edited by Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. To understand the abolitionists’ side of the debate, refer to Kathleen Barry’s *Female Sexual Slavery* and anything by Donna Hughes. For a general overview on the debate, see *Female Sex Trafficking in Asia: The Resilience of Patriarchy in a Changing World*, by Vidyamali Samarasinghe.

profession” (18). This labeling of what constitutes legitimate sex work weakens trafficked women’s position: “the silence of the abject [trafficked women] is reinforced by the Western professional prostitutes, as the prostitutes’ rights movements do not for the most part speak for the rights of these vulnerable groups and do not recognize what they do as sex work” (Penttinen 18).

In academia, the trafficking/prostitution binary has generated debates over third-world women’s “victimhood” and “agency,” still contested arenas in feminist and postcolonial studies (Aradau 43). For the purpose of this analysis, I will concentrate on postcolonial stories of subaltern women in the third world who have fallen victims of trafficking by abduction or trickery (the latter the most common means of recruitment) because their circumstances show a much darker side of “the feminization of superexploitation” (Spivak, *Outside* 113).⁶ I am not making a moral judgment or suggesting that third-world women who choose to be trafficked for prostitution as a means of emigrating to the West should be denied civil rights, or that they do not end up paying the price of exploitation; their situation is frequently just as appalling as that of those deceived or coerced, but that is beyond the range of this work.

According to Stephanie Hepburn and Rita J. Simon, “[d]espite nation-specific differences, the characteristics of human trafficking are remarkably similar worldwide,” since the analogous “traits of the trafficking experience can be seen in any nation regardless of geographical location or whether the nation is considered first, second, or third world” (Hepburn

⁶ Often, girls who lack opportunities to support themselves or their families are promised “decent” jobs somewhere else by boyfriends, relatives, or acquaintances, so they enter the sex trade unknowingly. Of those trafficked women who know that they will be prostituting themselves, many report that they had no idea about the inhumane way in which they would be actually treated, so, despite initially consenting to being trafficked for sex work, once these women are in the trade, they become virtual slaves with limited ability to escape. At the same time, NGO workers claim that they have recently begun to witness an increase in kidnappings, as traffickers find it easier to abduct girls than to deceive and convince them to follow them (see www.tapestri.org).

1). In this analysis, then, I explore six works from diverse contexts in order to examine representations of sexual trafficking/abduction of postcolonial women within the current neocolonial economic framework. Beginning with the turn of the twentieth century, when sex trafficking became an actively organized global business for the first time legally defined, I look at selected texts from authors such as James Joyce (Ireland), Therese Park (Korea), Mahasweta Devi (India), Amma Darko (Ghana), Chris Abani (Nigeria), and Roberto Bolaño (Chile).⁷ I hope to contribute to the scholarly dialogue with a fresh perspective that incorporates fictional narratives from different parts of the postcolonial map dealing with a crime that, according to research in a variety of disciplines, overwhelmingly affects racialized third-world women, especially “during the past three decades” that have seen an increase in female migration in search of work (Samarasinghe 115).

I particularly concentrate on identifying recurrent motifs in order to find transnational connections that can speak of a crisis that has been exacerbated with the ascendancy of deregulated finance capital especially after decolonization, when third-world women’s bodies have become readily expendable commodities. Echoing Elina Penttinen’s Foucauldian analysis, I examine “how globalization is inscribed on [ethnicized gendered] bodies and how individuals are subjected by globalization” (xii). The “body in demand in the current globalized world,” Penttinen argues, “is the body of an eroticized exotic woman, who adapts to the rugged landscape and fitness tests posed by globalization processes, by traveling or being trafficked to the West for the purpose of sex work” (xv). The “sex industry” has now become “a global

⁷ The authors I analyze here represent my selection, but other postcolonial writers have addressed female sex trafficking in their fiction, among them Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Chika Unigwe, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Saadat Hasan Manto, Nora Okja-Keller, Chang-rae Lee, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and Bapsi Sidhwa.

phenomenon linked to the general political, economic, and social developments within societies, regionally and internationally” (Amir xiii).

I therefore approach the topic within those contexts--political, economic, and social--observing how sanctioned institutions have profited from the existence of trafficked women, for example, through the early twentieth century patriarchal and xenophobic discourses utilized to police women and reinforce ideas of nationhood (in Chapter One: James Joyce’s “Eveline”), through the military (in Chapter Two: Therese Park’s *A Gift of the Emperor*), through national governments (in Chapter Three: Mahasweta Devi’s “Douloti the Bountiful”), through the legal system in destination countries (in Chapter Four: Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon* and Chris Abani’s *Becoming Abigail*), and through financial institutions regulating transnational capital (in Chapter Five: Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*)—invariably, the common thread among such systems is the reliance on disposable third-world women and the silent complicity of those in power who profit from their oppression.

Noticeably, while prostitution has been addressed by countless literary works, postcolonial authors have not particularly dealt with female sex trafficking, and only recently has this subject gained prominence, perhaps as a result of the media exposure it gained in the 1990s after some dreadful cases made headlines, or the 1996 public apology of the Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto for the atrocities committed against Asian women during World War II.⁸ Statistics show that “[t]he past three decades have seen female sex trafficking becoming

⁸ Some of the many existing literary studies of prostitution include Katie N. Johnson’s *Sisters in Sin: Brothel Drama in America: 1900-1920*, Andrew M. Beresford’s *The Legends of the Holy Harlots: Thais and Pelagia in Medieval Spanish Literature*, Laura K. McClure’s *Courtesans at Table: Gender and Greek Literary Culture in Athens*, Harold Bloom’s *Stephen Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Alan Jackson and Patsy Fowler’s *Launching Fanny Hill: Essays on the Novel and its Influences*, Christiane Schonfeld’s *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature*, Bradford K. Mudge’s *The Whore’s Story: Women, Pornography and the British Novel, 1684-1830*, Deborah Anna Logan’s *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse*, Charles Bernheimer’s *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, María R.

one of the fastest growing criminal activities,” which could account for the late emergence of a literary interest in the topic as well (Samarasinghe 56). I do not wish to imply that sex trafficking disappeared after the early twentieth-century campaign against what was called “white slavery,” but rather that there followed a gap of time when trafficking was out of public consciousness; as a result, postcolonial authors have only begun to write more about it fairly recently, so there are no book-length studies on sex trafficking in postcolonial literature yet.

I have chosen the novels under analysis to reflect the evolution of global sex trafficking from its inception to the present. Overall, transatlantic sex trafficking gained its initial momentum at the turn of the twentieth century through what was termed “white slavery” from Europe to the Americas (and, to a lesser extent, to colonized territories in Asia and Africa);⁹ new transportation and communication technologies, among other factors, facilitated this illicit movement of women. The two world wars diverted trafficking routes, and other criminal niches emerged as the military demanded prostitutes to service troops engaged in combat. After World War II, colonies gradually become independent, but while decolonization initially promised prosperity, the subsequent decades proved to be economically disastrous for former colonies as they became bound to developed nations through gargantuan “recovery” loans.¹⁰ As a consequence, trafficking patterns reversed: overall, researches observe that from the second half

Gonzalez’s *Imágen de la Prostituta en la Novela Mexicana Contemporánea*, Martin Seymour-Smith’s *Fallen Women: A Sceptical Enquiry into the Treatment of Prostitutes, Their Clients and Their Pimps, in Literature*— the list goes on.

⁹ China, Japan, and Middle Eastern, and post-socialist countries also traffic women for prostitution, but this work focuses on postcolonial stories only, assuming the term “postcolonial” as understood in academia (colonies under Western European power from the mid-twentieth century to the present). Following such criteria, I will not analyze sex trafficking in post-socialist nations either, even though they account for a large portion of the sex trafficking market.

¹⁰ See Lazarus for further clarification on the situation of postcolonial countries since 1945 to the present.

of the twentieth century onwards, postcolonial countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America began to supply women to the developed world (Trochón 44-5).¹¹

The media has reflected such trends. Through intensive ideological dissemination against white slavery at the turn of the century, moral scare campaigns tried to protect white women from dangerous foreign procurers--and prevent them from attempting to gain some independence that would defy established patriarchal orders. As mentioned above, the two world wars pushed the trafficking issue aside until fairly recently. After 1920, for example, noticing that not only white women were being trafficked, the US government began to pass several acts aimed at curtailing the immigration of single women from poor countries in an effort to stop the entry of “undesirable” individuals who could threaten the American gene pool of largely Western European origin (as Lauren Berlant observes, “[o]f course, every crisis of immigration in the U.S. history has involved the claim that something essentially American is being threatened by alien cultural practices”) (312). These discriminatory legislations also impaired women’s agency and mobility in general.¹² Yet the laws gave the impression that human trafficking was under control--until the 1990s, when dreadful news started to re-emerge, and the Bush administration launched an aggressive campaign against sex trafficking. The timing was not incidental: “[e]ager to complement his war on terror with a parallel ‘soft-power strategy,’” Noy Thrupkaew maintains, “Bush signed on to the ‘war on trafficking’ with a vengeance” (13). At the same time, Thrupkaew observes that “much of the money went to organizations [. . .] whose interventionist attitude was congruent with Bush’s foreign policy stance, and to groups that believed that

¹¹ I want to acknowledge once again that sex trafficking movements and patterns are indeed difficult to establish.

¹² The US was not alone in this trend. To quote an example from another popular emigration destination that will be analyzed here, Argentina also passed restrictive “leyes de residencia” [residency laws] around the same time, favoring white (preferably educated) immigration.

prostitution was inherently exploitative and deserving abolishment,” thus reflecting how the sex trafficking issue has often been manipulated for political purposes beyond the welfare of the women trafficked (13).

From an international perspective, the jump to the 1990s clearly reflects the collapse of postcolonial economies after independence because of debt, which dramatically exacerbated global sex trafficking. At the same time, many Western countries developed tougher border and immigration policies to respond to the escalating influx of people from impoverished countries in search of survival opportunities after their own countries could not support them. Since then, laws to control illegal immigration in Western nations have tended to become more restrictive and exclusionary; for example, in 1996, the US passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act restricting “access to healthcare, except for emergency care, for undocumented migrants and further entrenched the border as a militarized zone with increased border patrols and technology,” which has ultimately translated into more preventable immigrant deaths (Segura 8). Gradually but steadily, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, immigration policies in the US have limited the entrance of “undesirable” (racialized and poor) immigrants, predictably pushing traffickers’ criminal activities further underground. The current situation in Europe presents a similar picture, since far-right political parties have gained support and popularity through resurrecting old discriminatory laws meant to keep immigrants from poor nations at bay. Yet criminalizing illegal immigration does not stop traffickers from bringing women into the global North: it only enhances traffickers’ power at the expense of the “imported” women.

Despite such a grim backdrop, in her 2005 article “Twenty-first Century Global Sex Trafficking: Migration, Capitalism, Class, and Challenges for Feminism Now,” the English and

gender studies professor Marjorie Stone notes the striking absence of analyses of sex trafficking in “literary and cultural studies ‘post feminist’ contexts,” when, according to her, the problem has reached dramatic proportions (33). Stone further judges that “more attention to sex trafficking by literary and cultural critics is needed, in part[,] because work in these fields can contribute in significant ways to understanding and grappling with the intractable complexities of this issue” (36). Stone’s frustration is justified because, while sociological research provides large amounts of data, sex trafficking does not seem to dominate North American and European feminist concerns although the topic’s urgency today demands such an examination. Stone rightfully wonders:

If economic globalization has in fact brought an explosion in the numbers of children, girls, and women sold into sexual slavery, what does this say about the impact of feminism in our time? How are contemporary writers, dramatists, and film-makers using the resources of their art to explore the nature of trafficking or the subjective experience of being trafficked into sex slavery, and how might such cultural representations contribute to developing effective anti-trafficking strategies? What can history and literature teach us about why attempts to grapple with sex trafficking succeed or fail? Are there significant parallels between the so-called “white slave trade” of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and what is now seen as the “new” global sex trade? [. . .] How do feminist theories of agency play out in the contexts where the only free choice may be between submitting or the prospect of beatings, torture, death, or retaliation against relatives?

These valid concerns will inform the exploration of the selected postcolonial works addressing sex trafficking. By interrogating the narratives named above, then, I look at the victim-trafficker-consumer triad in order to determine each party's presence or absence from the text and the implications in terms of the discourses these representations may tacitly legitimize. I ask what type of postcolonial narratives the West privileges and why, and what role postcolonial theory can play in overcoming subaltern women's exploitation within a neocolonial context. Above all, I question how postcolonial literature can help (or not) to promote social change, analyze the purpose of artists in representing exploitative situations, identify the type of engagement readers have with these characters, and seek to understand audiences' response to such literature.

The fact that postcolonial writers may not achieve international success unless they address certain themes, or more established figures "discover" them, should be considered as well. Mahasweta Devi provides a fruitful example: while Mahasweta claims to write for a local audience, Spivak has turned her into an international icon through her translations, and one can only wonder if Western academia would ever have assigned Mahasweta this relevance without the intervention of a Western-educated Indian critic of Spivak's caliber. Such nuance, in turn, compels us to question the type of postcolonial narratives the West privileges and why (considering that there are possibly millions of stories that the West never reads or cares to read), and the subjective role postcolonial theory plays in overcoming subaltern women's oppression. Do postcolonial literature and theory favor certain stories, then? What type of sex trafficking stories are privileged in the current global context? Overall, in this analysis I question if postcolonial literature and theory can generate fruitful social interventions beyond the level of academic discourse. With these intentions, this work at times adopts Gayatri Spivak's "strategic

essentialism” in order to find productive avenues of expression for third-world women, who despite increasingly constituting the bulk of the work force worldwide, continue to be exploited and, in the case of sex trafficking, brutally violated.¹³

From a literary standpoint, the danger of turning the trauma endured by rape victims/survivors into an erotic spectacle or an aestheticized tableau to be admired from a safe distance poses a challenge to the artist. In her essay “On Style,” Susan Sontag accurately notes that “[i]n the strictest sense, all contents of conscience are ineffable. Even the simplest sensation is, in its totality, indescribable. [. . .] Stylistic devices are also techniques of avoidance. The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences” (*Against Interpretation* 36). As will be demonstrated throughout the different chapters, to symbolize the “ineffable” most of the authors analyzed here depict rape through tropes of suffering and torture from the point of view of a victim who frequently elides the sexual violence she has endured from her consciousness. When a rape is explicitly present, the narrative tends to stress the aggression inflicted on the victim rather than project an erotic performance. Describing rape thus presents a problem for the artist who wants to put trauma into words without showcasing it as “yet another performance for the voyeur,” while the writer’s focus can compromise the book’s marketability depending on the way the narrative is constructed: an author can showcase a titillating scene akin to a sexual fantasy (likely to entice readers), or barbaric torture of a hopeless female victim (likely to repel audiences) (Berndt 180).

¹³ In *The Postcolonial Critic*, Spivak explains: “the universalizing discourse could be useful and then [one should] go on to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field. I think we have to choose strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. [. . .] In fact I must say I am an essentialist from time to time. There is, for example, the strategic choice of a genitalist essentialism in anti-sexist work today” (11). Spivak later abandons this concept of “strategic essentialism” for the purpose of achieving social change, yet I refer to it because it helps define my position in this research.

When looking at the female victims/survivors, then, I compare their representations in terms of their agency or lack thereof, the way in which the violence committed against them is elaborated in the text, and the purpose they serve as literary depictions of third-world women. In particular, I am interested in examining if these narratives generate a sympathetic awareness of the position of a vast number of postcolonial women in order to improve their dreadful situation, or if they evoke paternalistic pity while providing the type of relief that orientalizes the Other and reinforces the superiority of the developed West in terms of its treatment of women--how lucky “we” are not to be like “them.” In other words, I examine the degree to which these postcolonial stories could be fetishizing these women for a political/sensationalistic purpose, since, predictably, all the narratives under analysis are woven together by the common thread of sexual violence, actual or potential. Female victims in these stories are abused, raped, tortured, and/or murdered. Yet, along with Sontag’s reflection on the power of silences, the depiction of that violence often moves from suggestion to complete elision. I therefore look at the way in which authors deal stylistically with the violated female body in order to avoid delving into erotica or voyeurism, how they create “art” from rape, how they resist glamorizing it in a way reminiscent of W. B. Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan” or Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and how they approach the difficulty (futility?) of representing rape.

Regarding the perpetrators of these crimes, I examine the degree to which their portrayals demonize them as the only visible faces of sex trafficking or orientalize them as problematic aliens (the Jews, the Asian mafias, the corrupt Africans, the Mexican drug dealers, etc.). Along these lines, I analyze the purpose the criminals in these narratives serve in the context of white ethnocentric discourse. As Kamala Kempadoo observes in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*, the US had redefined organized crime from “white collar and corporate activities”

in the early twentieth century, to “organized criminal conspiracy led by gangsters, ‘unassimilable’ immigrants and ‘undesired’ aliens” by mid twentieth century. “By the 1960s,” Kempadoo explains, “it was believed [that] foreign elements ‘threatened the integrity of the local government . . . corrupted police officers and lawyers . . . infiltrated legitimate businesses . . . [and] subverted the decency and integrity of a free society,’ conflicting with, or even posing a danger to, the very fabric of society and the state” (xviii).

I thus consider the possibility of traffickers becoming the “tip of the iceberg” of a crime that has far broader political, economic, and ethical implications, since, according to the most current data on sex trafficking, men from Western, developed nations are the major purchasers and consumers of sex from trafficked third-world women.¹⁴ “In human trafficking,” Samarasinghe asserts, “the demand is centered, mainly, if not exclusively [,] on the male customers, who, by and large [,] finance the sex industry. Spatially, it is located at the points of destination” (163). Sheldon X. Zhang notes that most human trafficking activities now “originate in countries in Asia, Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe and move to western Europe, Australia, and North America” (16). Interestingly, the demand side often remains absent from the narrative, perhaps reflecting the actual situation where the “cruel” trafficker and the “illegal” prostitute turn into sensationalist news material but the reason why they exist in the first place is kept safely under the rug. Indeed, one cannot simply forget that, for the sex trafficking business to achieve the ultra-profitable margins it continues to gain, a considerable sector of the Western male population must be demanding and paying, as demonstrated by the data on women and

¹⁴ Stephanie Hepburn notes that the “US is one of the top 10 destinations for human trafficking—with tens of thousands of people trafficked into the country each year. There have been reports of trafficking in over 90 US cities. In fact, the US is the most frequent destination for victims trafficked from Latin America [. . .] and one of the top three destinations for persons trafficked from Asia [. . .] for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation” (3).

children's movement from origin to destination countries. "The sex industry," Samarasinghe further explains, "is structured in such a way that the male customer enjoys the privilege of being anonymous in a socially stigmatized activity, while the prostitute whether 'free' or trafficked, is often exposed to the contempt of society" (9).

Along with reflecting on the symbolic invisibility of the trafficked woman, perhaps we should pay more attention to the opportune invisibility of the male customer. The fact that prostitution continues to be regarded as a "necessary evil" since "men will be men," while the women who satisfy their demand are scorned and debased, speaks of the resilience of patriarchy today. When we do hear in the media about the men involved, Kempadoo remarks that "[p]rofiteers appear almost exclusively as networks of foreign men, and trafficked persons in these scenarios become poor brown or black women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, or young women from Eastern Europe or Russia" (xvii). In this way, the demand side generally escapes the headlines, when, in fact, "without assistance from 'legitimate' businessmen, lawyers, police and other law enforcement officials, politicians, and CEOs of large corporations [...] organized crime is unsuccessful" (xviii).¹⁵

Looking more closely at the consumers' profile, we can identify "three sets of actors and stakeholders" involved in sex trafficking; the different chapters will reflect upon each of them:

The core group is the individual male customers. First, are the men who solicit and buy sex, variously known as customers, clients, Johns, curb crawlers and punters[.] The second group is the direct profiteers of trafficking. There are the individuals and groups, consisting mainly, but certainly not exclusively of males.

¹⁵ As reported by Nicholas Kristof on 03/31/2012, it was recently discovered that Goldman Sachs was involved in a sex trafficking scandal: "The biggest forum for sex trafficking of under-age girls in the United States appears to be a Web site called Backpage.com [...] partly owned by private equity financiers, including Goldman Sachs with a 16 percent stake" ("Financiers and Sex Trafficking").

They are recruiters, pimps, brothel owners and managers, criminal gang members, drivers, and corrupt officials who form the immediate link between the customer and the service provider. [. . .] The third group of stakeholders includes institutions and organizations that facilitate the industry such as the tourist and entertainment industries, criminal organizations, the military, and also the state. (Samarasinghe 167)

Regarding main destination sites, although concrete and definite patterns are admittedly difficult to establish, some sources identify “[t]he United States of America [. . .] as the world’s second largest destination/market country (after Germany) for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the sex industry” (qtd. in Schauer 146). Other sources position Spain and Greece as top destination (and later transit) countries, which of course reflects the fluctuations of the world economy. What investigators generally agree on is that transnational trafficking moves from impoverished country to affluent one, so it sounds credible that the US would rank high as a destination. Despite this fact, researchers in the field observe that its citizens seem unconcerned, “almost to the level of national denial—as if slavery, which is the essence of human trafficking, could not possibly exist in this democracy” (Logan 4). Statistics show that thousands of third-world women are continually trafficked into American cities (especially Atlanta and Los Angeles, the latter a sort of Mecca for the porn industry), so where are they? Who is “consuming” them? Who tells their stories and how?¹⁶

There is evidently a market for these stories, as the popular phenomenon *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2006), part of Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium Trilogy*, proves. The astounding

¹⁶ Although this work concentrates on international traffic from postcolonial countries, there is ample evidence of proving that women and children are being trafficked for sexual exploitation within the United States (as well as countries in Europe--Spain currently epitomizing this phenomenon).

success of this Swedish novel revolving around sex trafficking reveals an uncanny fascination with the topics of forced prostitution and rape. While I do not suggest that Larsson's depiction of female rape and trafficking is exploitative, I want to draw attention to the commercial aspect of the subject matter and its sales potential in the publishing and film industries (even an international clothing brand has profited from the popularity of these novels; as reported in the *Guardian*, in 2011, H&M designed a collection entirely inspired by Lisbeth Salander, the powerful heroine of the trilogy) (Swash). One obvious reason that could account for audiences' reverence of Larsson's character is that Lisbeth *has* agency: she is an astute and strong avenger who, by herself, survives rape, punishes her rapist (rapes her rapist), and plays the system to end up with a fortune--in short, she embodies the perfect individualistic feminist heroine of the twenty-first century. The stories this work examines, on the other hand, will complicate issues of subaltern women's agency by showing no happy endings. Unlike Larsson's empowered protagonist, the postcolonial women here described will probably never motivate much commercial celebration.

If we think of the relative scarcity of literary representations of sex trafficking (and criticism) by postcolonial writers in comparison with works about prostitution, the darkness of sexual slavery immediately comes to mind. Lack of aesthetic analyses of this topic highlights a critical gap that, as Stone points out, literary studies and feminist theory must address in order to generate productive interventions for trafficked women today. With such intention, this work will connect postcolonial literature with a number of interdisciplinary sources both in English and Spanish from the fields of sociology, anthropology, trauma theory, history, and journalism. My decision to explore the topic as interpreted in postcolonial literature owes to its potential for opening a fruitful ethical debate in the humanities. Undeniably, statistics do help, but numerous

studies show that they pale in comparison to the force of a story. More important, in the study of literature, discussions about empathy are central, granting the debate a human perspective lost in numbers or even in journalistic testimonials that, because of the shock value of the accounts, may end up desensitizing the audience and depoliticizing the issue. As Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag observe in their analyses of photography, portraying shocking violence may have a counterproductive effect, numbing viewers and depoliticizing the representation instead of mobilizing social change.

With such context in mind, any literary analysis of female sex trafficking from the twentieth century onwards necessarily requires a feminist global economic examination. In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock identifies what she calls “the paradox of abjection as a formative aspect of modern industrial imperialism,” stressing that

[u]nder imperialism[,] certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity: the slum, the ghetto, the garret, the brothel, the convent, the colonial bantustan and so on. Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed and so on. [. . .] Inhabiting the cusp of domesticity and market, industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its constitutive, inner repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part. (72)

This work, then, concentrates on those abject women trafficked or abducted for sexual purposes who, as McClintock suggests, through their “hidden” work contribute to the smooth-functioning of the capitalist engine. With this in mind, I will examine the literature through the lens of multiple theorists, some of whom engage in postcolonial, feminist, and/or Marxist

criticism, because I believe that combining these theoretical frameworks can shed light on the current sex trafficking crisis, allowing female subaltern voices to speak and audiences to hear what they have to say. In turn, these approaches will illuminate the ethical response the Western world owes to these women on whom it continues to build its development, but it conveniently refuses to acknowledge.

2 James Joyce's "Eveline" and the Emergence of Global Sex Trafficking in the Early 1900s

We caught the tread of dancing feet,
We loitered down the moonlit street,
And stopped beneath the Harlot's House.

...

Like strange mechanical grotesques,
Making fantastic arabesques,
The shadows raced across the blind.

We watched the ghostly dancers spin
To sound of horn and violin,
Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.

Like wire-pulled automatons,
Slim silhouettes skeletons
Went sliding through the slow quadrille,

...

Sometimes a clockwork puppet pressed
A phantom lover to her breast,
Sometimes they seemed to try to sing,
Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoked its cigarette
Upon the steps like a living thing.

Then turning to my love I said,
"The dead are dancing with the dead,
The dust is whirling with the dust."

But she, she heard the violin,
And left my side, and entered in;
Love passed into the house of Lust.

Then suddenly the tune went false,
The dancers wearied of the waltz,
The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl,

And down the long and silent street,
The dawn, with silver-sandaled feet,
Crept like a frightened child.

Oscar Wilde, "The Harlot's House"

This journey into the abject world of female sex trafficking begins with retelling the experience of the Pulitzer Prize winner and *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, who, as mentioned in the introduction, in the twenty-first century bought himself an underage Cambodian sex slave and wrote a book about it. Through his book and weekly editorials, this journalist strives to raise awareness of the evils of contemporary sexual slavery and inspire the first world to support his campaign to prosecute traffickers more harshly, while rescuing third-world girls “one brothel raid at a time.” In the twenty-first century, Kristof has become a media favorite in championing the abolitionist cause in the United States.

But Kristof’s approach is not new. During Victorian times in England, the journalist and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, William T. Stead, came up with the same idea. Prompted by the British feminist Josephine Butler’s campaign to repeal several Contagious Diseases Acts (which targeted women suspected of prostitution and subjected them to compulsory and humiliating physical examinations while keeping male consumers free and anonymous), Stead devised the same plan as Kristof did to prove that sexual slavery existed in England and that it was easy for a man to buy an underage sex slave.¹⁷ With only five pounds, Stead purchased a young girl and then wrote a sensational article he called “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁸

¹⁷ In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock explains that “The [Contagious Disease] Acts were designed less to abolish prostitution than to place control of sex work in the hands of the male state; as will be developed in more detail in the following chapter, “the argument ran that the real threat to the prowess and potency of the national army lay in the syphilitic threat that prostitutes supposedly posed to the genital hygiene of the army” (287-8). Controlling women and ensuring their purity was, above all, a means of preserving the health of military men.

¹⁸ I do not wish to imply that Kristof exploits women’s stories in order to sell books. The journalist seems deeply committed to eradicating sex trafficking (see Kristof’s columns “The Face of Modern Day Slavery” and “Fighting Back, One Brothel Raid at a Time” in the *New York Times*). His approach, on the other hand, is debatable (see Noy Thrupkaew’s “The Crusade against Sex Trafficking: Do Brothel Raids Help or Hurt the ‘Rescued’?” in *The Nation*).

As Stead had calculated, this piece of news spawned a literal scandal that quickly spread beyond England, as “[t]elegraphic services rapidly transformed the ‘Maiden Tribute’ into an international event. Stead proudly boasted that his ‘revelations’ were printed in every capital of the Continent as well as by the ‘purest journals in the great American republic.’ Unauthorized reprints were said to have surpassed the one and half million mark” (Walkowitz 82). The momentum generated before the article’s release is worth recounting: three days ahead of publication, on July 4, 1885, the newspaper issued a “frank warning” urging the most sensitive individuals *not* to read the paper because the content they would see would shock them to the extreme--a brilliant marketing technique as the copies ran out in no time and consequently ended up being sold at much higher prices (qtd. in Walkowitz 81). George Bernard Shaw himself, who also worked for the *PMG* and whose interest in the relation between prostitution and poverty would become evident in his *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1893), actively helped with the papers’ distribution to the pleading public.¹⁹ Anne McClintock contends, without exaggeration, that in 1885, “W. T. Stead set London aflame with his lurid revelations about child prostitution” (*Imperial Leather* 288). But, unlike the case of the girl Kristof bought in the twenty-first century, the horror surrounding the events at the turn of the twentieth century was that the slave Stead purchased was *white*.

In this chapter I will analyze James Joyce’s “Eveline” (1904), looking at the moral panic about “white slavery” in Europe and the new continent, especially focusing on Argentina, the foremost recipient of trafficked women between 1880 and 1930 (and, of course, Joyce’s destination choice for Eveline). It was precisely at the turn of the twentieth century that, along with the popularity of transatlantic migration, sex trafficking went fully global and news about

¹⁹ Shaw was actually critical of the social purity movement and later parodied Stead’s “Maiden Tribute” in some of his work (Marshik 204).

international “dangers” for single white women reached the general public, provoking all kinds of repressive reactions through what became known as the “social purity” movement. In *British Modernism and Censorship* (2008), Celia Marshik explains that by now “scholars have demonstrated [that] Joyce’s texts contain extensive allusions to white slave panics,” so this analysis will connect the ideological perception of sexual danger with the actual trafficking situation in Buenos Aires that Joyce surreptitiously hints at in “Eveline” (127).

In her book *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (2003), Katherine Mullin explores the historical context of Joyce’s publications in light of the censorship generated by social purity activists who aimed at supervising morality, seeking to preserve the unity of the family and the chastity of both women and men. In England, a pioneer in the transnational abolitionist cause, the “Maiden Tribute” scandal gave birth in 1885 to two influential organizations devoted to fighting sex trafficking: the National Vigilance Association, founded by Stead himself, and the Jewish Ladies’ Society for Preventive and Rescue Work. The social purity movement quickly reached the United States, where anxieties about white slavery in the hands of corrupt foreign elements had already begun to alarm audiences and were expressed in unsettling stories such as Frank Norris’s “Bandy Callaghan’s Girl” (1896) and “The Third Circle” (1897). To tackle moral corruption, several vice-policing associations surfaced nationally and locally--the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice being perhaps the best-known, with the banning of Joyce’s *Ulysses* listed among its notorious accomplishments. As Mullin notes, “social purity was an international and, particularly, transatlantic phenomenon, as British organizations like the National Vigilance Association, and United States groups like the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice communicated with each other and borrowed one another’s strategies” (5). In Argentina, another favored destination of emigrants, similar movements emerged, so delegates

from European anti-vice societies visited Buenos Aires and established associations to monitor and prevent white slavery, which, relevant to this analysis, was widely believed to be dominated by Jewish traffickers.

However, Jewish outlaws did not actually monopolize this crime. As documented by Ivette Trochón among other South American historians, such as Gerardo Bra and Andrés Carretero, Argentina was then indeed the headquarters of the biggest global Jewish criminal organization fully dedicated to sex trafficking: the “Varsovia” [Warsaw], better known later as the Zwi Migdal.²⁰ Historians point out that there were other criminal groups operating in Argentina as well, such as the French Le Milieu, which was almost as lucrative as the Zwi Migdal, yet far more tolerated because of Argentina’s infatuation with French culture at the time (another difference is that, unlike the Zwi Migdal, the French criminal organization was not legally registered).²¹ Overall, the Argentinean sex trafficking business was roughly split between these two criminal groups: the Zwi Migdal mainly imported impoverished Jewish women (especially from Warsaw, with “the largest Jewish population in Europe in 1900”), and Le Milieu trafficked women from Marseilles to Buenos Aires (there was also a smaller French

²⁰ According to Ivette Trochón, Jewish sex trafficking into Argentina started around the 1870s and was loosely organized until 1906, when the first Jewish society of mutual help was legally registered and officially recognized under the name of Varsovia (Trochón 334). As documented by Gerardo Bra in his book *La Organización Negra: La Increíble Historia de la Zwi Migdal*, this was only a façade, as the association was fully dedicated to sex trafficking and all its members were criminals (29). From now on, I will refer to this organization by its most familiar name, Zwi Migdal, even though it was effectively called this for only one year before it was dismantled in 1930. In 1929, the Polish consul in Argentina, Ladislao Mazurkiewicz, complained to the Argentinean government that this criminal organization shared the name of Poland’s capital, therefore prompting the name change (Trochón 341). Since most historians call it Zwi Migdal, I will use the same name to avoid confusion.

²¹ At the turn of the century, French architects were brought to Buenos Aires to design several buildings for the government and the oligarchy, so some of the city’s neighborhoods have a strong Parisian resemblance—in fact, Buenos Aires was known then as the “Paris of Latin America.”

association trafficking women from Paris) (Bristow 53).²² The crime was thus handled primarily by Jewish and French traffickers who shared a very lucrative market in relative “harmony” --Jewish prostitutes [‘las polacas,’ as they were referred to in Argentinean slang] serviced lower-class customers, while French prostitutes [‘las franchutas’] catered to a wealthier public (79; 90-1).

Predictably, even though Jewish traffickers and their recruited prostitutes constituted a small minority of the total Jewish population living in *fin de siècle* Buenos Aires, the sex trafficking issue took on other dimensions when anti-Semitism was added to the mix. Ben Zion Hoffman “lamented in 1906 that ‘all the papers and organizations that deal with the slave traffic remark that Jewish girls from Russia and Galicia comprise a large part of the living merchandise’” (Bristow 8). As a consequence, many Jewish feminists became actively involved in the global fight against sex trafficking: the anarchist Emma Goldman played a primordial role in the American press, while the German Bertha Pappenheim became well-known internationally for her persistent crusades.²³ Indeed, lurid stories of Jewish trafficking circulated profusely in the media as cautionary tales and chilling examples of what could happen if a woman dared to cross imagined or actual frontiers, enticed by someone perceived, in the years leading up to World War I, as embodying the quintessential white Other.

²² There was also local prostitution and a smaller group of Italian procurers, but those were not as strong and organized as the Zwi Migdal and Le Milieu.

²³ Bertha Pappenheim has become well-known not only for her commitment to fighting global sex trafficking (especially Jewish), but also for being the first patient of psychoanalysis—renamed “Anna O” in Freud’s texts.

2.1 Like “a helpless animal”? Like a Cautious Woman

Hugh Kenner’s ground-breaking reading of “Eveline”—one of seduction and betrayal by a sailor who probably intended to “pick himself up a piece of skirt” and later abandon the girl at the port in Liverpool (Kenner 21)—inspired Katherine Mullin to argue that, because of the white slave traffic propaganda disseminated by social purity ideologues, Joyce’s choice of Argentina as Eveline’s possible destination was an act of subversion against censors. Several clues in the story suggest that Joyce knew more about white slavery than earlier scholars initially thought and that he, as Mullin contends, slyly incorporated such discourse in his tale. While this chapter will rely partly on Mullin’s investigation, it will not focus particularly on her argument about Joyce and censorship but will concentrate on the possible links between Joyce’s story and the sex trafficking industry thriving in Buenos Aires through the Jewish criminal association Zwi Migdal. Frank’s representation allows us to draw this connection because his behavior with Eveline coincides with the seduction and recruiting methods employed by Zwi Migdal procurers.

In her book, Mullin refers to Ruth Rosen stating that “to ascertain whether or not white slavery actually existed is both an extremely difficult and highly controversial task for any historian to attempt, and it is not a question best explored here” (78). That missing piece of the puzzle will be the kernel of this chapter: here, I will describe the historical situation of white slavery in Argentina at the time “Eveline” takes place in order to provide further evidence supporting the existence of Eveline’s “hidden story” (Kenner 21), concentrating on the representation of a potential trafficking victim and her trafficker together with the ideological implications of such portrayals. This analysis adds to Kenner’s skeptical reading of the sailor by suggesting that, in light of the historical situation in Argentina and Joyce’s hyper-analyzed ambiguities, Frank could be a (Zwi Migdal?) recruiter and Eveline a potential sex slave. In fact,

if we follow Fredric Jameson's dictum and historicize the tale, it is possible to imagine that Eveline's likely outcome if she leaves Dublin with Frank is that of becoming a trafficked prostitute in Buenos Aires.

In her 2009 book *Las Rutas de Eros*, the Uruguayan historian Ivette Trochón documents sex trafficking patterns during the early twentieth century, concluding that between 1860 and 1930 sex trafficking of women occurred predominantly from Europe to the new continent (and, to a lesser extent, to imperial outposts in Africa and Asia such as Johannesburg and Bombay) (21). With painstaking detail, Trochón explains that, in this period, the trafficking of white women originated in countries such as Poland, Russia, France, and Italy and disembarked primarily in Argentina, Brazil, and, on a smaller scale, the United States. The main ports of departure were "Marsella, Génova, Burdeos, El Havre, Liverpool [under suspicion in Kenner's argument], Vigo, Lisboa" (23). The reasons for this emergent wave of international sex trafficking were various: new technologies such as the steamship and the telegraph that facilitated transatlantic movements; the high indexes of masculinity in the new continent that created a demand for "imported" women; the disruption of family dynamics generated by the movement to urban centers because of industrialization; the pervasive poverty especially in eastern Europe, that persuaded members of the more exploited populations to search for fortunes abroad: all valid motives that, in turn, opened a space for women to attempt some independence in foreign lands (21).²⁴

²⁴ I have paraphrased Ivette Trochón. The original account reads: "En las últimas décadas del Ochocientos el tráfico de mujeres, la 'trata de blancas' como se llamo entonces, alcanzó un desarrollo sin precedentes, y en América estuvo estrechamente vinculado a las grandes corrientes migratorias decimonónicas, convirtiéndose en una de sus consecuencias no deseadas" (21). The author further adds: "los barcos de vapor, los ferrocarriles, el telégrafo [. . .] facilitaron la expansión del 'comercio infame', y las nuevas rutas oceánicas, abiertas por el canal de Suez y mas tarde por el de Panamá, hicieron los desplazamientos mas accesibles, catapultando el fenómeno a una escala planetaria" (21). Trochón concludes: "es posible sostener que entre 1860 y 1930 el tráfico de mujeres se realizo fundamentalmente desde el viejo continente hacia América y, en menor escala, hacia África o Asia" (Trochón 21).

In Argentina, inevitably, the promising economic prospects enticed both legitimate and criminal immigration. The hopes for material advancement of impoverished Europeans (especially Jews, who were experiencing extreme discrimination and consequent pauperization) combined with the constant demand for female prostitutes, so many women saw the opportunity to emigrate. Historians document that only a small percentage of such emigrant women were deceived and later enslaved in brothels; the majority of trafficked women knew that they would be working as prostitutes. Yet what one should bear in mind when analyzing “Eveline” is the overwhelming ideological perception between around 1885 and the late 1930s that Argentina was a literal trap for innocent, unsuspecting virgins whose naiveté would lead them to a life of perdition.²⁵ At the turn of the century, that “Buenos Aires” meant “white slavery” had become common knowledge.

Probably because of the widespread anti-Semitism reigning in Europe and the Americas, the activities of the criminal Jewish organization always stood out over the same crimes committed by the French ones.²⁶ And even though Jewish traffickers mainly targeted Jewish women (often through seduction and promises of marriage), fears of Jewish procurers on the

²⁵ In the original Spanish version, Trochón explains: “Una ola de pánico—alimentada por una prensa sensacionalista que hizo de la trata un folletín terrorífico--recorrió el mundo occidental convirtiendo el robo de “jóvenes vírgenes” en una de las preocupaciones publicas del momento” (Trochón 25).

²⁶ Of course, not every Jewish immigrant in Argentina was a trafficker, although that was the prevailing ideological assumption, which tended to stigmatize the Jewish community (traditionally discriminated against) even more. Interestingly, Jorge Luis Borges’s ancestors have Jewish connections. His grandmother’s sister, the British Caroline Haslam, married in England a Jewish man from Livorno, Girogio Suares (Hadis 298). Because of Suares’s Jewish connections in Argentina, the couple traveled and settled there in order to start a legitimate business (with no relation to sex trafficking or the Zwi Migdal); that was the reason why Borges’s future grandmother, Frances Haslam, came to Argentina around 1870 (at the height of Jewish immigration into the country), where she later met the Argentinean Colonel Francisco Borges Lafinur and married him (Hadis 298). So there were clearly separate Jewish communities in Argentina. Traffickers, called the “unclean” ones, constituted a minority and were considered pariahs, completely ostracized from the “respectable” Jewish population. This is partly why associations such as the Zwi Migdal originated: to allow the “unclean” ones to continue practicing their faith and performing their Jewish rituals in the temples and cemeteries (even theatres) built by the organization.

prowl for Christian girls like Eveline in Joyce's story were common, which only fed the ubiquitous anti-Semitism of the time. Joyce's own connections to and interest in the Jewish community, particularly in Trieste (at the time of Joyce's residence, part of the Austro-Hungarian empire), could suggest that he was aware of the activities of Jewish pimps in Buenos Aires, an open secret both in Europe and Argentina. In any case, what is undeniable is the fact that, because of the great demand for white prostitutes from Europe, Argentina was a favored destination for trafficked women who ended up working under highly structured sex trafficking organizations (Trochón 22).

2.2 Frankly speaking, "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you"

As Joyce scholars know, the stories in *Dubliners* thematically center around *paralysis*--a key term for most critics, with the word generally functioning "as a metaphor for the plight of the characters caught up in situations that they can neither completely comprehend nor control, and from which they cannot escape" (Doherty 35). Beginning with the crippled priest in "The Sisters" who leaves readers utterly uneasy, to the alienated Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case," and ending with Gabriel Conroy's thoughts on the dead, Joyce gives readers a glimpse of the stagnation he feels Ireland suffers. Analyzing "Eveline" from the depiction of her burdened existence, critics have extrapolated Joyce's criticism of the extent of Irish people's inability to act for their own benefit. Through the perils of Eveline, they argue that Joyce describes the failure of a girl to move forward and become herself, thus implying that Ireland will remain static, drowning in its own corruption unless the country takes action. The most common readings of this story have contrasted the freedom that awaits Eveline, represented by the open sea, with the subjugation she feels at home. Joyce places this story after "The Sisters," "An

Encounter,” and “Araby,” as a way of preparing the reader to understand why Eveline remains “paralyzed” in the end.²⁷ Eveline’s everyday life is haunted by a promise to her dying mother, an abusive alcoholic father who takes her money, a monotonous job, and the children who have been left to her charge. Despite this somber panorama, she stays. Just like Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, Eveline mortifies herself, and many have agreed that the oppression in which she lives perversely grants her the only security she has ever known. As a collection, *Dubliners* thus attempts to create a consciousness of the state of Ireland and the Irish through its characters, showing how they experience, in their own personal way, the entrapment of a country that has turned into a waste land and to which Joyce himself famously declared *non serviam*.²⁸

“Eveline” was first published in *The Irish Homestead* on September 10, 1904. Almost exactly one month later, on October 8, Joyce moved to Pola, Austria and later Trieste, Italy, where he began his permanent exile.²⁹ As documented by Richard Ellmann and other biographers, Joyce’s emigration initiated his arduous struggle for publication of his short story collection that lasted ten years. During this time, Joyce revised the story making considerable

²⁷ None of the previous stories allows an outlet for the main characters. The young boys depicted in them come to an awareness of the corrupt environment where they live, but there is no indication of a possible escape for them.

²⁸ Emigrating was a popular decision at the time, but one that the author deeply scorned as another betrayal of his nation. Of course, Joyce’s own emigration to the Continent with Nora Barnacle barely a month after the publication of “Eveline” adds a layer of irony to this story, yet, unlike many of the characters in *Dubliners*, Joyce always remained involved with Ireland and frequently expressed his desire to help his compatriots progress. As Joyce wrote to his publisher Grant Richards after the latter kept requiring deletions and modifications to the manuscript of *Dubliners*: “I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (qtd. in Leonard 92).

²⁹ Trieste, a cosmopolitan port city on the North East coast of Italy, formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1867 and 1918, but it maintained a predominantly Italian identity. After World War I, the city was occupied by the Italian army, and it was officially annexed to Italy in 1920. Joyce lived there between 1904 and 1920, hired by the Berlitz School to teach English to immigrants. At the time, there was a considerable underclass of port laborers from all over the world, while the city was notorious for its red-light district located near the docks. John McCourt observes that Trieste was the “world’s seventh busiest port, the second in the Mediterranean after Marseilles” (29). In such a context, one can speculate that stories of white slave traffic in Buenos Aires would have been heard by Joyce, especially since much of the policing against sex trafficking occurred at the ports.

alterations (in Hans Walter Gabler's words, the story's final version is "significantly different from the text published in *The Irish Homestead*"), but Eveline's closing rejection of Frank, the sailor who promises her a new life in Argentina, stayed the same (xxx). Many have argued that her panic attack at the docks offers the ultimate proof of Eveline's (ergo Dubliners') paralysis. Several critics concur that Eveline cannot help but remain immured in the comfort of her familiar routine, thus failing to escape the trap.³⁰

Yet such received wisdom changed when Hugh Kenner began to suspect Frank's intentions in his book *The Pound Era* (1971) and to openly suggest that Frank is a liar through his analysis of a couple of commas in his "Molly's Masterstroke" (1972) and later in his *Joyce's Voices* (1978). Kenner challenged the "conventional and superficial" readings of "Eveline" that present this (anti)heroine as paralyzed in the end, unable to embrace a promising future with Frank in Buenos Aires (Norris 55). Instead, Kenner questions the sailor's frankness (now a seducer? a pimp?). Since then, other scholars have offered provocative responses to Kenner's reading--the most extreme positions best exemplified by Sidney Freshbach, who, comparing Kenner's interpretation of Frank to house of cards, confesses his desire to "collapse [Kenner's] argument [suggesting that] Frank changes from being a character in a short story by Joyce to an invention of [Kenner's] own," and Katherine Mullin, who persuasively suggests that Frank could actually be a procurer by analyzing the ideological atmosphere of Victorian England (Freshbach

³⁰ Critics frequently point to "Eveline" as the story that most evidently shows paralysis. As Trevor L. Williams asserts, "[i]n story after story one petite-bourgeois character after another is brought to the mirror to apprehend his or her situation, but (and Eveline is the *prime example*) they see no way to act, no way to transcend the limits of their present consciousness or class position" [my emphasis] (54). Peter De Voogd summarizes the traditional critical reception of "Eveline" in his essay "Imaging Eveline, Visualized Focalizations in James Joyce's *Dubliners*", explaining that this story has generally been interpreted as "the most obvious story in *Dubliners* to express the sterile paralysis that Joyce thought of as typical of Dublin life" (48). However, De Voogd does not read Eveline as a "helpless animal" (Joyce 32). He claims instead that "Eveline's final refusal to go with Frank has little to do with sudden paralysis or real helplessness"; the fact that Eveline "set her white face to him" implies "activity and deliberation, [. . .] an almost perverse act of the will" (48).

223; Mullin 69). Other critics, such as Garry Leonard and Suzette Henke, “see the menacing and abusive father as a potentially greater threat to Eveline’s safety and welfare than the risk of a possible seduction and abandonment by a lying sailor” (Norris 59). Margot Norris, for her part, focuses on Joyce’s narrative omissions, while she opens the possibility of yet another interpretation of Eveline’s “decision by indecision” at the end of the story (57). Norris argues that “the point of the story may be less the adjudication of the correct choice than to have the reader experience the [. . .] desperate uncertainty of such a life-altering choice,” but she shares Kenner’s apprehensive view of Frank (59).

I would like to pause for a moment on Katherine Mullin’s analysis because she furthers the existing scholarship by proving through carefully documented archival evidence that, during the time Joyce was writing and revising “Eveline” for publication, the social purity movement in England and Ireland had ignited a moral pandemonium around stories of unscrupulous pimps suspiciously akin to Frank and sexual enslavement of innocent white girls uncannily similar to Eveline--Stead’s article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* epitomizing such discourses. Mullin notes that “[p]ossible connections between Stead and Joyce have been thoroughly explored in two studies by Grace Eckley, *The Steadfast Finnegans Wake* [1994] and, more recently, *The Steadfast James Joyce: A Social Context for the Early Work* [1997]” (174). Mullin concurs that “Joyce knew about Stead, most plausibly through his friend, the Stead disciple Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, and was most likely familiar with the ‘Maiden Tribute’ scandal” (174). In fact, Joyce mentions Stead in passing in Part V of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)--“MacCann began to speak with fluent energy of the Czar’s rescript of Stead, of general disarmament [. . .]”—so we know that Joyce was aware of the journalist’s existence (176).

Looking beyond *Dubliners*, Mullin also finds suggestive connections in what she identifies as Eveline Hill and Frank's "intertextual identity" as the girl "has two eponymous pornographic namesakes[:] the heroine of a mid-Victorian classic of [the] genre, *Eveline, or the Adventures of a Lady of Fortune who was Never Found Out*, and John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, [while] the name of her lover also recalls the Victorian flagellant novel *Frank and I*" (196). Such titles circulated in Joyce's time as popular readings, and therefore we can speculate that the author could have played on their presence in the fantasies of his audience. John McCourt comments in *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920* that Joyce had "an uncommon interest in matters of sexuality [and that he] would send home [to Ireland] books that would so scandalize the Irish reading (and non-reading) public that would accuse him of being the Antichrist" (24). Arguably, sex trafficking of white virgins was the titillating turn-of-the-century topic par excellence.

To begin with, we know that Joyce was conscious of the flourishing white-slave traffic from Europe to Buenos Aires, not only from Stead's article and the international scandal it generated but from a copy he possessed and annotated of *The White Slave Market* (1912).³¹ Mullin notes that "the extent to which Frank's courtship uncannily suggests that of a villain in white slave tracts is probably most strikingly demonstrated" in the following excerpt from that book:

Some pimps take months and months to gain proper control over their victims. . . .
For a long time, one fiend incarnate contented himself with merely "walking out"
with the girl, taking her to cheap picture shows, buying her little presents, meeting

³¹ Celia Marshik explains that, despite its apparently prudish/cautionary intention, this book "is replete with erotically charged episodes" (196). The critic further adds that "[s]ome contemporary readers judged *The White Slave Market* to be undiluted naughtiness" (196).

her as she came home from work and doing everything that would take her mind off his villainy. Once he had taught her to trust him, to love him, he ruined her and ruthlessly “dumped” her into the inferno at Buenos Ayres. (qtd. in Mullin 70)

Frank does fit the pattern: we know little about when the affair started, but Eveline remembers

well [. . .] the first time she had seen him; he was lodging in a house on the main road where she used to visit. It seemed a few weeks ago. [. . .] Then they had come to know each other. He used to meet her at the stores every evening and see her home. He took her to see the *Bohemian Girl* and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him. [. . .] People knew that they were courting and when he sang about the lass that loves a sailor she always felt pleasantly confused. First of all it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him. (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29)

Thinking about her possible emigration with Frank, Eveline puzzlingly anticipates being judged “a fool,” which could suggest her awareness about the potentially negative consequences of her decision and explain her subsequent panic attack at the docks (28). More scandalously, her self-judgment could alternatively insinuate that (if only remotely) Eveline might be contemplating the possibility of a life in the trade in Buenos Aires; after all, Dublin was notorious for “the sheer number of ‘fallen women’” that Eveline would have been accustomed to see, and, interestingly, whose demographics closely match her own (Marshik 130). As analyzed by Marshik, the typical prostitute in Ireland “was in her twenties, uneducated, and poor[.] Most of these women were partially or completely orphaned, resulting in decreased financial and emotional support as well as in a lessening of surveillance” (130-1). The penniless and

motherless Eveline easily falls into the group procurers would entice.³² The opera Frank takes Eveline to see also invites speculations, as the author also mentions *The Bohemian Girl* in “Clay,” another story with connections to prostitution. Here, Maria, the main character, works in the kitchen of the Lamplight Laundry, a Protestant charity where “fallen women” were reformed by offering them “decent” jobs (although Maria is not a “fallen woman” herself). A “letter to his younger [. . .] brother indicates [that] Joyce was aware that ‘wicked’ or sexually experienced women worked at the laundries,” especially after being rescued from prostitution (Eide 62).

As for Eveline’s suitor, while Joyce gives us more ellipsis than concrete data, “the sailor who calls himself Frank” makes at least three suspicious claims (Kenner 20): he tells the girl stories about the “terrible Patagonians”; he says that he has a “home” waiting for her; and, of all places in the world, he wants to take her to “Buenos Ayres” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29-30). As Kenner contends, “[c]aught up as we are in the pathos of [Eveline’s] final refusal, we may not reflect on the extreme improbability of these postulates, that a Dublin sailor-boy has grown affluent in South America, and bought a house and sailed back to Ireland to find him a bride to fill it” (Kenner 20-1). Let us analyze the plausibility of such claims in light of what was happening in Argentina.

By the time of the story’s first publication, “heavy immigration from Europe” to Argentina had already started. From around 1830 to 1930, sporadic waves of Irish immigrants reached Argentinean coasts in search of a better future, tempted by the “spectacularly rapid economic and cultural development” happening during those years (although Mullin provides evidence showing that between 1902 and 1904 no Irish emigration to Argentina was recorded) (Whitaker 2; Mullin 62). This halt does not look coincidental, as in 1902 the Argentinean

³² See Marshik for a similar analysis of the female protagonists in Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) and their vulnerability to prostitution.

government passed the “Ley de Residencia” to restrict immigration, in part to prevent the entrance of traffickers, while the Asociación Nacional Argentina Contra la Trata de Blancas [National Argentinean Association against White Slave Trafficking] was founded among local anti white slavery campaigns organized by the newspaper *El Tiempo* (Trochón 281). Irish immigrants arriving before then generally settled in Buenos Aires, the capital city, or in Patagonia. Noticeably, these groups constituted a clear minority when compared to the influx from other nations such as Spain and Italy (the overwhelming majority, with cultural and linguistic affinities), and France and Germany (to a lesser extent). Jewish immigration was also encouraged, as the Argentinean government desperately needed to enlarge the agricultural workforce in order to compete in the international market (those rural laborers became known as the “Jewish gauchos”).³³ By 1914, “around one-third of the country’s population was foreign born, and around eighty percent of the population were immigrants and those descended from immigrants since 1850,” with Spaniards and Italians comprising the largest slice of the foreign community (Rock 166). Thomas F. McGann explains that, in fact, “one-half of the total of economically active people in the country in 1914 were foreigners” (31). It thus sounds credible that Frank in Joyce’s story could have attempted a new life in Buenos Aires. What raises many eyebrows is the successful picture he paints of himself to Eveline.

The most obvious of Frank’s fabrications lies in the seductive “stories of the terrible Patagonians” he tells the young girl (Joyce, *Dubliners* 30). A quick look at any Argentinean history book can confirm: a) that the Patagonians had been long wiped out by the time Frank is

³³ The Jewish communities in the fertile Pampas region greatly contributed to increase the productivity and wealth of the Argentinean nation, which enjoyed unparalleled prosperity in the years before WWI through the end of WWII. The Jewish “gauchos” were allowed to purchase land and settle in La Pampa, Santa Fe, and the countryside of Buenos Aires; incidentally, the name “polacas” also referred to legitimate female Jewish immigrants (not only Jewish prostitutes).

traveling around the world, and b) that they were not nearly as “terrible” as Frank portrays them. Don Gifford corroborates in *Joyce Annotated* that “in Victorian times little was known of [the Patagonians] except that they were said to be the tallest of human races,” while he further notes that “[l]egend took over from there and created a race of near monsters” (51). In reality, Jonathan C. Brown explains in his chapter “Ancient Argentina and the European Encounter,” that the native Patagonians were “quite small [. . .] families or clans” of hunters that “moved mainly on foot and set camps based on the seasons and hunting opportunities” (17, 16). Their “tools were simple, usually bone and stone weapons and scrapers, products of their Stone Age existence” (17). When Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century, the conquistadores set in motion a systematic crusade of annihilation of the native aborigines in Argentina, which was relatively easy to accomplish given that the tribes were scattered around the territory, and never managed to constitute strong empires like those of the Incas, the Aztecs, or the Mayans. This decimating trend continued for centuries until General Roca’s infamous “Campaign of the Desert” in 1879, where he completed “the end of indigenous resistance [by extermination],” and, therefore, “southern Pampas and Patagonia became open for settlement” (287). Unlike the rest of South America, Argentina had practically lost its native inhabitants (especially in Patagonia) by 1879.

From a historical standpoint, then, the “terrible Patagonians” Frank describes to Eveline were clearly a myth, yet such a fable gives the sailor a convenient alibi to “inflate” his deeds and (hopefully) seduce the girl. By mentioning this extinct tribe and its fierce attributes, Joyce could have tried to paint Frank as an opportunist charlatan who only tries to entice the girl out of Ireland for a short sexual escapade to Liverpool (as Kenner suggests), or as a procurer attracting his prey to sell her in Buenos Aires (as Mullin argues). Joyce was finally able to publish *Dubliners* while living in Italy, in 1914, having spent his time since 1904 for the most part

between Trieste and Rome, with only brief visits to Ireland. Judging from the context where Joyce lived for almost ten years, it is reasonable to assume that the author knew that the monstrous Patagonians existed only in the collective unconscious of conquistadorial minds. After all, by the time Joyce was revising *Dubliners* for publication, Argentina and Italy had already consolidated cultural ties through the vast number of Italians in contact with relatives in the new continent, who could testify that the dreadful Patagonians were nowhere to be seen.

The second of Frank's problematic assertions comes from the supposed "home" he claims to have in Buenos Aires (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29). Sidney Freshbach has supported Frank's credibility in terms of the money he could have made in Argentina, arguing that "it is possible that Frank 'fell on his feet' there and bought a house" (223-4). This might have been the case, but it would have presented an unusual scenario. By the beginning of the 1900s, the Argentinean oligarchy prided itself on the possession of land, which makes it unlikely that Frank, or any other poor, uneducated immigrant, could have purchased (very expensive) property. Let us remember that Frank claims to have "started as a deck boy at a pound a month on a ship of the Allen line"—a footnote in Margot Norris's edition of *Dubliners* defines this position as that of an "inexperienced worker hired to help the crew on a ship with menial tasks and errands" (29-30). He most likely would have suffered the fate of other sailors, who managed to make enough money to live on but were certainly far from prosperous.

Non-educated immigrants could obtain jobs, but their status generally remained marginal. As Arthur P. Whitaker comments, it was "the oligarchy's unwillingness to admit [uneducated immigrants] on terms of equality that kept them from becoming full-fledged members of the Argentine nation" (58). Whitaker further explains that it was easy for immigrants "to acquire citizenship by naturalization after only two years' residence, but they could still neither vote nor

hold office, and naturalization would only subject them to compulsory military service” (58-9). As a result, by 1914, “the vast majority of foreign-born residents remained alien,” which only makes it more improbable that a supposed sailor like Frank could have owned anything in Buenos Aires (59). David Rock, for his part, observes that “in 1914 it was estimated that four-fifths of [immigrant] working class families lived in one-room households,” in what used to be called *conventillos* (175). If Frank is really a sailor, this sounds like the most plausible of his alternatives--if not, the “seduction and swindle” hypothesis makes a compelling case (Norris 56).³⁴

Sex traffickers, in contrast with most immigrants, enjoyed an enviable economic position in Argentina that would have allowed them to purchase property with ease, since they earned considerable amounts of money out of the prostituted women and were therefore constantly searching for new recruits to import. French prostitution, for example, was directly linked to Argentina’s oligarchy, as wealthier men preferred (and paid substantially more for) a French prostitute or “cocotte,” which accounts for the clear favor that Le Milieu members enjoyed. As for Jewish traffickers, even though they were stigmatized, the affluence they acquired was certainly conspicuous: the headquarters of the Zwi Migdal society of mutual help in Buenos Aires was a luxurious mansion in Calle Córdoba 3280. It contained a synagogue, an ample party hall, a bar, a room to perform wakes, another room for business meetings, and a garden with tall

³⁴ If we analyze the collection as a whole, the seduction theory becomes even more prominent. *Dubliners* presents many speculators who would quickly sell their souls to make easy money for themselves, without ever considering what would benefit their fellow Irish, man or woman. In “Two Gallants,” for example, Lenehan and Corley devise a shameful strategy to extract a gold coin from a slavey. Similarly, Ignatius Gallaheer in “A Little Cloud” has long traded Ireland for England and shows no scruples in admitting that he would marry a woman for her money, as he confesses about a potential wife: “[s]he’ll have a good fat account at the bank or she won’t do for me” (66). Even women seduce and deceive in *Dubliners*, and here Polly, Mrs. Mooney’s daughter in “The Boarding House,” comes to mind, as she finds herself a husband through a dubious behind-closed-doors arrangement between her mother and the chosen male victim (56). In “The Dead,” Lily, the caretaker’s daughter who opens the story, puts it in plain words: “The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you” (154). The notion that Frank could be following similar steps with Eveline, then, should not surprise anyone.

palm trees; in some of its rooms, Trochón details, marble and bronze plaques commemorated the memory of presidents, vice-presidents, and secretaries of the association (92). These facilities, among others the Zwi Migdal possessed, allowed Jewish traffickers and prostitutes to continue practicing their faith and their rituals, as the respectable Jewish community treated them like pariahs. In *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas*, Isabel Vincent notes that, during its heyday, Zwi Migdal members and their recruited prostitutes were “completely banned by the respectable Jewish community” and “ostracized [as] the unclean ones,” but that did not prevent their ultra lucrative business from prospering until its dismantling in 1930 (Vincent 12; Bristow 5). Unlike sailors, sex traffickers in Argentina were undoubtedly wealthy.

According to Mullin, “Frank closely matches the stereotype of the itinerant international procurer, ‘bully’ or ‘cadet’, charming the gullible with tales and rash promises” (69). Mullin notes that “[p]rocurers in social purity propaganda were almost always ‘of foreign parentage, probably a Jew, a Frenchman, an Italian, or perhaps a Greek’” (69). In her analysis, Mullin highlights Frank’s foreignness without specifying any particular nationality, but a look at the most common methods of recruitment can shed more light on the sailor. French recruiters, for example, offered the women jobs as prostitutes and did not resort to courtship or marriage (Carretero 114). Jewish procurers, on the other hand, often seduced the women and promised them marriage in order to traffic them from Europe into Argentina (114).³⁵ Such a strategy would lead us to connect Frank with Jewish pimps: of those Jewish girls who were deceived, a majority

³⁵ I have paraphrased Andrés Carretero: “Cuando existió la compra [. . .] de prostitutas europeas, no fue necesario aparentar ningún matrimonio[.] Estaban acostumbradas a ello y trabajar en Marsella, Hamburgo o Buenos Aires, sólo era cuestión de ganancias[.] Zwi Migdal se inició con la instalación de prostíbulos en cadena. Para ello los rufianes ‘se casaban’ con mujeres que mandaban a traer o traían ellos de Europa” (114). Also, see Gerardo Bra (116-7).

reported that it was through tactics of courtship similar to the ones Frank seems to be employing with Eveline.³⁶ Joyce's destination choice (the infamous turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires) and his own interest in Jewish themes (as evidenced in *Ulysses*) invite speculation.

Several critics have pointed out that *Dubliners* offers an embryonic version of Joyce's oeuvre. In it, the author began the experiments both with form and content that would recur in his later masterpieces. In fact, Joyce initially conceived the germ of the story that flourished into *Ulysses* as one for the *Dubliners* compilation. It does seem pertinent, then, to read his collection of short stories in light of *Ulysses*, where the author directly references white slavery and the atmosphere of moral reform surrounding it. In "Circe," for example, the discourses of white slavery, prostitution, and Jewishness become intertwined. During Leopold Bloom's nightmarish trial, the City Recorder explicitly vows "to put an end to this white slave traffic and rid Dublin of this odious pest. Scandalous!" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 384). As for the ideological links between "vice" and Jewishness, Marshik observes that, "Zoe [the prostitute Leopold Bloom encounters outside Bella Cohen's brothel,] [l]ike Bloom, [. . .] has a complicated ethnic and national identity: when Bloom asks her if she is Irish, Zoe responds that she is English [perhaps trafficked into Ireland?] but then murmurs Hebrew under her breath" (154). Marshik further points out that Bella Cohen "again links the (racially) Jewish Bloom with fallen women" (154). The critic points out that "Cohen's name implies that she is, or has married someone, of Jewish descent, and Bloom refers to 'our mutual faith' in an attempt to placate her" (154). But, to complicate Joyce's ambivalent treatment of the subject, later in the trial Bloom himself becomes the target of anti-Semitic racist accusations, as Alexander J Dowie summons his "Fellowchristians and antiBloomites" to proclaim the Jewish ad salesman "a disgrace to christian men," a Caliban "bronzed with infamy"

³⁶ Raquel Liberman, the woman who denounced the Zwi Migdal in 1929 and eventually caused its downfall, was seduced through methods strikingly similar to those employed by Frank with Eveline (Bra 116-7).

(401). In such a context, the adjective “bronzed” suggests Jewishness and foreignness.

Noticeably, in *Dubliners* Joyce describes Frank’s complexion with the same word: Eveline remembers how “[h]e was standing at the gate, his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward over a face of bronze” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29). While we don’t know much about Frank or Bloom’s physical appearance (in Bloom’s case, it differs according to the speaker, while we only know Frank through Eveline’s eyes), the chosen term and its associations with Jewishness in *Ulysses* are suggestive.

At the height of colonial expansion, “[b]iological racism” had become pervasive. Africans’ and Asians’ pigmentation presented no problem for white colonizers, but Irish and Jewish populations demanded more creative signifiers of racial inferiority (Walkowitz 35). In her analysis of Charles Booth’s investigations of London poverty and violence at the turn of the century, Judith Walkowitz explains that “Jews bore the physical stigmata of racial Otherness” (35). Boasting pseudo-scientific expertise, Booth claims: “‘It is not difficult to recognize the Jews,’ facial features, skin pigmentation, even posture and bearing denoted their racial type. [. . .] ‘the observant wanderer may note the [. . .] darker complexion and unmistakable nose’” (qtd. in Walkowitz 35). Such racialized discourse was widely reproduced in popular magazines such as *Punch*, whose cartoons, as analyzed by Vincent Cheng in *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995), had become staple images in Britain. Joyce subverts this hegemonic perception by painting highly unsympathetic portraits of nationalistic Irish Catholic men who scorn Leopold Bloom by projecting onto him insidious racial stereotypes. In “Cyclops,” for instance, the citizen makes remarks about the Jewish “queer odour” and Joe Hynes calls the salesman “a bloody dark horse,” while in “Nestor” Mr Deasy worries that “England is in the hands of the jews [. . .] And they are the signs of a nation’s decay. Wherever they gather they eat up the nation’s vital strength” (Joyce

Ulysses 250; 275; 28). Mr Deasy's anti-Semitism may relate to "complaints about the traffickers' colony in Buenos Aires [that] began reaching Europe in the 1880s. In 1888 an alarmed correspondent in Buenos Aires wrote to London's Anglo-Jewish Association about the "immoral practices committed in this city by Jewish immigrants" (Bristow 115). As has been suggested throughout, the condemnable activities of a select group of Jewish traffickers reinforced the ideological association between Jewishness and white slavery, thus obscuring other criminals' presence and participation in the same illicit business.

If Joyce had in mind the prototypical Jewish procurer of anti-white slavery propaganda, Frank's portrayal would appear to contradict the author's sympathetic image of Leopold Bloom (a character who, despite his ambiguities, resists stereotypes and shows signs of generosity and compassion throughout *Ulysses*: contributing to the Dignam fund to help the fatherless children, visiting Mrs. Purefoy at the hospital and empathizing with her pain, trying to keep Stephen out of trouble in the red-light district, etc.). Yet Joyce's incorporation of the white slavery subtext in a clichéd, superficial manner may have little to do with reinforcing stereotypes and more with highlighting Frank's unreliability by playing with the ubiquitous fear of Jewish procurers seducing Christian virgins, thus keeping the girl seemingly paralyzed within a narrative that, otherwise, would offer little relief. Indeed, readers get the impression that, by staying in Ireland, Eveline will probably become as stagnant as the other characters in the collection, as the girl's life seems to follow her mother's (like Joyce's own mother's) overworked pattern.

Akin to the situation of pauperized Jewish populations in Eastern Europe, Ireland's colonial status contributed to the pervasive poverty and lack of opportunities experienced by its citizens, which in turn propelled continuous migration into the Americas after the 1845 potato famine. Eveline's social class, like that of all the trafficked female characters analyzed in this

work, plays a crucial part in her contemplating the prospect of emigration with Frank. Readers never perceive Eveline having feelings of love towards Frank; at the most, she hints at some anticipation about abandoning a life of poverty and oppression in Dublin. In this respect, I concur with Mullin's argument that these characters could have become Joyce's weapon against social purity censors and their white slavery moral campaigns, well-known British imports. The inclusion of a (potentially Irish-Jewish?) procurer in "Eveline" then could be read as "an archly unpatriotic use of British anti-emigration propaganda" that bothered Irish readers and prompted the swift termination of Joyce's relationship with *The Irish Homestead* after only three stories (Mullin 75).

In any case, if Frank has "immoral" intentions, what awaits Eveline in a city full of distrustful immigrants speaking a language she does not know, with the ghost of prostitution lurking in the shadows, does not look enticing. Without any exaggeration, in the early 1900s the options of a young Irish girl who did not speak Spanish, alone in an unfamiliar city where the main source of income for lower-class aliens came from the port--traditionally, men's territory--were minimal. Several sources confirm the omnipresent perception that prostitution was a bleak feature of Buenos Aires at that time, which, according to David Rock, "reflected the marked lack of women immigrants" (176). "Early in the twentieth century," Rock explains, "Buenos Aires had ill-fame as the center of white-slave traffic from Europe" (176). Katherine Mullin, likewise, observes that, by 1904, "the city was perceived to be the international capital of the White Slave Trade" and that "the phrase 'going to Buenos Ayres' was turn-of-the-century slang for 'taking up a life of prostitution, especially by way of procurer's offices'" (189). In *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*, Donna J. Guy reports that "[y]oung girls, even those with no intention of migrating abroad, were advised not to walk unescorted at night" for fear of being enticed into a

trap in a distant country (5). The hysteria about white slavery and the city's "terrible international reputation as the port of missing women" was such that "the very name of Buenos Aires caused many a European to shudder" (Guy 5). Guy explains that "[b]y the 1860s the Continental press reported frightening stories of women lured away by strangers with false promises of marriage or work, only to be trapped in some sordid house of ill repute," yet the author suggests that such reports "were cautionary tales for independent European females," and she observes that white trafficking stories achieved a mythological proportion, when, in fact, "verifiable cases of white slavery were infrequent [and] highly exaggerated" (6). When they did occur, however, they involved "a system of forced recruitment by lovers, fiancées, husbands and professional procurers," while, predictably, "one or two particularly nasty incidents were sufficient to persuade the European public that their women were endangered in foreign lands" (6).

Leaving myths aside, historians confirm that there were powerful global sex trafficking associations operating in Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which commanded a vastly profitable business. The most well-known and best-organized association, the Zwi Migdal, had international ramifications (with connections in places as diverse as Rio de Janeiro, New York, Bombay, Johannesburg), but found a central outpost in Buenos Aires, where the government condoned the presence of their 2,000 brothels and their prostitutes (Trochón 96; Bra 70, 114). Zwi Migdal members' treatment of their recruited women illustrates cases of literal slavery, as the prostitutes were sold from one owner to another and often endured brutal threats, punishments, and ongoing exploitation (Bra 37; Carretero 120). Zwi Migdal today is considered a disgrace by the Jewish society in Argentina--a name no one wants to remember because it brings about a collective feeling of anxiety since the activities of a minority group of Jewish criminals were used as an ideological weapon to disseminate anti-Semitic propaganda; "[i]n

Buenos Aires,” Bristow notes, “every Russian or Polish Jew was believed to be a trafficker, no matter how respectable he might be” (215). Unfortunately, much of the evidence of the Zwi Migdal’s operations has been destroyed by the society’s members. Historians remark that, while there is absolute certainty of the Zwi Migdal’s existence and proof of their crimes, the society carefully manipulated the evidence of their illicit activities in order not to leave incriminatory traces and to evade the authorities (Bra 35). The 1994 terrorist attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires erased most of the remaining archives, yet some documentation still exists (Vincent 10-1).

I want to stress once again that Jewish pimps generally recruited Jewish girls. But--it bears repeating--the paranoia over Christian girls’ dishonor related more to ideological perception than empirical fact, a subtext that Joyce could have subversively incorporated in his tale. From the “Nestor,” “Cyclops,” and “Circe” examples quoted above, readers understand the pervasive anxieties about Jewish individuals corrupting European Christianity. Indeed, in “the age of pandemic anti-Semitism,” Bristow explains, “anti-semites failed to acknowledge that Jewish traffickers normally recruited Jewish women. The young Hitler in Vienna was particularly influenced by the accusation that Jews trafficked in Christians” (4). Bristow recounts Hitler’s memories of his visit to Vienna in 1907 and his impressions of the Jewish white slave traffic as described in *Mein Kampf*:

In no other city of Western Europe could the relationship between Jewry and prostitution and even now the white slave traffic, be studied better than in Vienna. . . . An icy shudder ran down my spine when seeing for the first time the Jew as an evil, shameless and calculating manager of this shocking vice, the outcome of the scum of the big city. (qtd. In Bristow 84)

This becomes no small detail as both Bristow and Trochón document that the white slavery discourse contributed to reinforce existing Jewish stereotypes, while we know that Hitler was aware of their involvement in sex trafficking and how “the nightmare of history” unfolded. “By the early 1890s,” Bristow remarks, “the image of the alien Jewish trafficker in Christian female flesh was a staple of the German anti-semites” (250). Thus, white slavery propaganda had far broader ramifications than the obvious policing of newly independent women and the voicing of feminist concerns, particularly because the trade was mainly attributed to Jewish traffickers.³⁷

Let us finally consider that Joyce wrote this story at the height of social purity campaigns in Dublin, where its port prominently displayed anti-white slavery propaganda that Eveline could be seeing at the North Wall while giving Frank “no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 32). Joyce later revised this story while living in Trieste, a cosmopolitan city with a thriving port, where tales of enforced prostitution in Buenos Aires would have not been unheard of. After all, the “vast majority of [European women involved in white slave trafficking] came from Eastern Europe, France, and Italy” (Guy 7). Ira Nadel illustrates the spectrum of Joyce’s many long and lasting friendships with Jewish people, with whom the author would

³⁷ Historians concur that those prostitutes recruited by Jewish traffickers endured harsher exploitation than the French ones, as the women worked under more precarious situations and were allowed fewer concessions by their traffickers. But, as Edward Bristow explains, “nowhere did [Jewish traffickers] achieve anything like a monopoly in any aspect of commercial vice” (2). Bristow further observes that “Jews were only one of many groups to share in this form of enterprise,” yet they “maintain[ed] an important position in brothelkeeping and procuring in parts of eastern Europe, Argentina, Constantinople, New York, and elsewhere; and they dominated the international traffic out of eastern Europe, especially in Jewish women” (2). “Between 1880 and 1939,” Bristow explains, “Jews played a conspicuous role in ‘white slavery’, as the commercial prostitution of that era was dramatically called. Not only was this Jewish participation conspicuous, it was also historically unprecedented, geographically widespread, and fraught with collective political dangers” (2). Yet Bristow also notes that, in terms of procurement, “the Chinese and Japanese played the biggest role of all in ‘white slavery’, thus demonstrating the term was itself a Eurocentric misnomer. The Jewish involvement was far from unique and can only be understood as part of the general phenomenon of nineteenth-century world migratory prostitution” (2). As Jo Doezema observes, despite the Victorian zeal to showcase women as ‘helpless animals’ susceptible to being deceived and trafficked, for the most part, “the turn of the century obsession with the ‘white slave trade’ turned out to be based on actual prostitute migration” (Kempadoo 44).

attend concerts and plays, share walks, etc.—the writer Italo Svevo (Ettore Schmitz) to name just one. “Throughout his life,” Nadel explains, “Joyce constantly sought the companionship, support, and knowledge of Jews through friendships that continued despite geographic relocations”; as a proof of “the misunderstandings which sometimes resulted from these associations,” Nadel mentions “the refusal of Switzerland in September 1940 to grant Joyce and his family an entry visa on the grounds that he was Jewish” (13). Knowing that in Trieste Joyce had several Jewish acquaintances with whom he exchanged frequent and candid conversations could suggest that he might have been familiar with the clandestine activities taking place in Buenos Aires, as Bristow confirms that “white slavery became widely known in Jewish communities” through the massive media dissemination (and discrimination) of the time (218).

Looking at “Eveline” in a broader historical context necessarily changes conventional readings of Joyce’s story. Contrary to the way most critics have traditionally interpreted it, as the one demonstrating the most conspicuous case of paralysis in *Dubliners*, “Eveline” could have a less depressing ending if the girl actually saves herself from a future of sexual exploitation in a foreign land. Historicizing “Eveline” both in Europe and across the Atlantic opens up a more optimistic panorama for the young girl, who may have wisely chosen to stay, instead of facing an ominous future with one of the many betrayers Joyce depicts in *Dubliners*. I do not wish to imply, however, that “Eveline” defies the notion of a paralyzed Ireland (a conspicuous trope throughout this short story), but that this particular character should not be assumed to embody that “paralysis” all by herself: once we add the ideological atmosphere and the historical context in which the story was conceived, the tables turn.

In “Magical Narratives,” Fredric Jameson reminds us that the text provides “clues [. . .] which lead us back to the concrete historical situation of the individual text itself, and allow us to

read its structure as ideology, as a socially symbolic act, as a prototypical response to a historical dilemma” (157). Knowing that white slavery was “one of the leading social issues of the age”—information that Joyce withholds from the narrative, but that we can assume Eveline (and Joyce’s original readers) must have been aware of—, her “choice is [...] much more complex and desperate than choosing between level-headed reality and flight into fantasy” (Bristow 5; Norris 58). The narration never suggests that Eveline has any romantic longing for the sailor, which could have provided enough motivation to plunge into the adventure. If anything, readers perceive that her despondent situation in Ireland is guiding her tentative choice. Leaving love out of the equation, Eveline’s “complicated mental state” gradually reveals itself to the readers as she cautiously debates the pros and cons of a life with a not-so-credible Frank and his promises of a not-so-secure future (Attridge 6). With his acknowledged scrupulous meanness, Joyce forces readers to debate with her, to decide with her. In the end, choosing between misery in her native country and potential enslavement in a foreign land, Eveline opts for the first (and sure) option. Yet let us not judge her too hastily because, although the story closes with Eveline visibly “passive” at the port, we know that the mere name of Buenos Aires would have conjured up enough ideological demons to make her doubt the idea of emigrating with the sailor. In light of Jameson’s insight, then, I would like to reaffirm Hugh Kenner’s reading of Joyce’s story. Sidney Freshbach has deemed Kenner’s “interpretation of Frank” as

clearly one of the weakest moments in Joyce criticism. Whether Frank is a dishonest seducer or an honest lover cannot be determined with the lights Kenner brings to illuminate the text. And no matter how many times I have read the story—trying to use Kenner’s “insights”—I find time and again there are simply not enough clues in the text to justify his judgments about Frank. (226)

And Freshbach is right. To fully convey Eveline's predicament, Joyce may have pointed readers *outside* the text: outside Eurocentric paradigms.

2.3 Conclusion

In the revisionist work conducted over the past years, historians concur that, for the most part, the white slavery hysteria of the turn of the twentieth century pursued political objectives: above all, the need to reinforce patriarchal ideas of womanhood and nationhood at a time when women were beginning to search for a place outside the home. The atmosphere of pervasive danger and latent sexual threat emphasized by the media aimed at preventing female independence and encouraging subordination to an economic order that benefitted from maintaining women's unpaid labor within the domestic sphere. Anne McClintock observes that

Controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic, so that, by the turn of the century, sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power[.] In the eyes of policymakers and administrators, the bounds of empire could be secured and upheld only by proper domestic discipline and decorum, sexual probity and moral sanitation. (McClintock 47).

Like the *Irish Homestead* editors, then, social purity advocates believed that the "angel in the house" should *stay* in the house. But instead of remaining in fear, many women nevertheless saw the opportunity to carve a space out through migration (some for prostitution, some for sweatshop work, some for adventure), while others become politically active, invoking precisely

the same discourse intended to keep them under the protection of the patriarchal wing.³⁸ White slavery thus turned into a powerful ideological master narrative. As Bristow explains,

[t]he supremacy of an obnoxious system of state-regulated prostitution nearly everywhere, the popular if false belief that most prostitutes had been recruited through deceit, the partly symbolic use of the prostitution question by feminists, and the development of widespread concern with public health issues like venereal disease, all combined to make white slavery into one of the most popular questions across the western world. (5)

Bristow further emphasizes that prostitute migration (some, admittedly, through deception) was so prevalent that “[a]round this issue [white slavery] there spread from England in 1899 an international crusade of considerable influence, and one whose work was later inherited by the League of Nations” (5).

In England, feminists such as Josephine Butler mobilized significant social change by spearheading campaigns against prostitution and sex trafficking that transcended the British Isles. In Germany, the Jewish feminist “Bertha Pappenheim judged correctly that white slavery was the most effective issue around which to mobilize her generation of Jewish women” (Bristow 6). The same occurred in the United States, where critics have pointed out that early American feminists occasionally utilized white slavery rhetoric to further their own political agendas, including the passing of the first White Slave Traffic Act in 1910 which prohibited single women from crossing state borders to perform immoral acts and criminalized interracial marriages. Sex slavery thus formed part of a discourse that utilized trafficked women for diverse

³⁸ It is worth mentioning that Nora Barnacle, Joyce’s future wife, took a considerable risk in leaving Ireland with Joyce in 1904 without having married him. For further details, see Brenda Maddox’s *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce*.

political purposes, often independent of what could have benefitted the trafficked women per se.

In the words of Anne McClintock:

Stead's tales of hapless virgins entrapped by lascivious aristocratic roués gave middle-class women a language in which to express for the first time the sexual distress, frustration and secret terror of Victorian marriage. As a result, the prostitute became the projection of middle-class anxieties and hypocrisy. Prostitutes' own voices, lives, motives and powers were swept away in the electrifying storm of middle-class outrage and voyeurism. (288)

As analyzed throughout, white slavery propaganda also had other insidious effects beyond the policing of women, as it carried xenophobic and racist overtones, with the crime mainly attributed to undesirable foreign elements. Without a doubt, Jewish involvement in sex trafficking was prominent and real (Bra 114), but Jews' participation in the crime conveniently elided the presence of other groups engaged in the same illegal business. Journalistic campaigns in the graphic media showing haunting images of orientalized traffickers and innocent white maidens generated a widespread anti-Semitic atmosphere that, not coincidentally, peaked before World War I.

The Great War that followed diverted sex trafficking patterns: on the one hand, it propelled more emigration to the Americas, especially to Argentina (Carretero 131); on the other hand, women became necessary in military camps. As will be analyzed in more detail in the following chapter, Edward Bristow observes that the military made full use of impoverished prostitutes. Interestingly, Bristow remarks that, despite the pervasive anti-Semitism of the time, “[b]etween the German conquest of Warsaw in August 1915 and May 1917, 24 percent of the 2689 women who registered for prostitution were Jewish[.] Of the grand total, 1054 were war

victims and 584 war widows” (285). Clearly, poverty played a major role in the women’s involvement in these activities, while Bristow further notes that “[i]n eastern Europe, where life for the Jewish masses became increasingly miserable between the wars, white slavery survived until 1939” (7). It thus becomes difficult to attribute these women full “agency” in the strict sense of the word—they obviously prostituted themselves as a matter of basic survival—but it would be possible to argue that they still retained some choice. In stark contrast, the following chapter will explore the horrors of an army that, through calculated official policies, kidnapped young women to serve as sexual slaves for the military during World War II. For those unfortunate girls, there would be no romantic courtships or promises of marriage, but blatant abduction, rape, and often murder.

In his story, Joyce incorporates a subtext of sexual slavery and plays with the prevalent fears disseminated by social purity propaganda in an (arguably) obvious way. The author sprinkles such stereotypical discourse throughout the pseudo-romance between the “innocent” girl and the “charming” sailor. But these characters’ representations must have resonated with audiences who soon demanded an end to such uncomfortable depictions of Irish virtue. When reading the story through the lens of Frank’s unreliability, this character becomes one more of the many betrayers that abound in *Dubliners*, “all palaver” with no substance (Joyce, *Dubliners* 154). From this perspective, it may be he who best embodies Ireland’s maladies, rather than the ever-passive Eveline herself. After all, despite her miserable life in Dublin, she seems smart enough not to fall for a potential inferno of sexual enslavement. In fact, as we shall see, the narratives that follow show that Eveline might have been, indeed, very lucky.

3 Sex Trafficking, War, and the Military in Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*

. . . and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it to him, there's others will, I said.

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Although sex trafficking from Europe to the Americas, as analyzed through Joyce's "Eveline," gained momentum at the turn of the twentieth century, the world wars interrupted the flow of women and presented the opportunity for new destinations. Now the large concentrations of men along conflict zones "naturally" demanded prostitutes near military camps. Edward Bristow observes that the military made full use of impoverished prostitutes during World War I. In this respect, he explains that "[t]he Germans were particularly efficient in organizing prostitution for their armies. They dispatched mobile brothels to the front and from 1915[,] as their forces advanced in the East[,] the red light districts of Lodz, Warsaw, and Vilna were expanded for the use of the troops" (285). The army's association with prostitution would continue throughout the armed conflicts and, as will be demonstrated here through the case of the Japanese Imperial Army, worsen during World War II.

The relationship between the military and prostitution in fact reflects an old story that conflates assumptions about men's masculinity, women's femininity, and a society's patriarchal ideas. More than ever, in times of war "values of patriarchal order are pushed to the extreme [,] brutal force and physical strength are admired and rewarded, and those men who are in uniform and engaged either in combat or in confined, regimented situations become preoccupied with

sex” (Oh 6). Regardless of the nation, the military has attempted to regulate more or less directly the presence of prostitutes/sex slaves around military bases for the personnel to consume.³⁹

The link between prostitution and the military has been studied and documented by sociological sources, with suggestive results:

“In 1992, the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs) was carried out in the USA. This study [...] represented a very important step forward in research on the demand for prostitution.” Through an anonymous questionnaire, the interviewers determined that “the percentage of men who had paid for sex and had served in the army was triple (35.9%) than those who had not served in the army (12.6%) (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata, 1994). (qtd. in Di Nicola 7)

So what ideologies normalize and make possible the use of prostitutes by a state-sanctioned institution such as the military? Cynthia Enloe has written compellingly about the subject, arguing that “it has taken calculated policies to sustain that [the military and prostitution] ‘go together’” (*Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 81). In fact, looking closer into this problematic relation, Enloe finds only cracks and contradictions in what apparently manifests itself as natural (*Does Khaki Become You?* 220). “The common conception,” Enloe argues, “is that decisions are driven by tradition and culture rather than deliberate, conscious thought. Nowhere is this easy assumption more pervasive than when patriarchy and militarization converge—in the gendering of militarization” (*Maneuvers* 33-4). Enloe further contends that “[c]ommentators on both domestic and international politics have spent many years *not* investigating how militarization

³⁹ For an analysis of women and militarism see Cynthia Enloe’s *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women’s Lives*. Here, Enloe explores the relation between women and the military in general by looking at the position of army wives, nurses, camp followers, prostitutes, and women soldiers within the institution.

occurs and how its progress relies on particular constructions of femininity and masculinity because many of these observers have lazily assumed that either tradition or culture was at work” (34).

Ideas inherent to the military institution--such as that “men will be men,” prone to violence and the exercise of unbounded sexual appetite when under stress and isolated--have justified the presence of prostitution close to military bases all over the world. Departing from such unquestioned assumptions, military officers have considered regulated prostitution a necessary evil, arguing that base-stationed men will supposedly be less inclined to rape “respectable” women in times of peace or combat if they have access to the services of sex workers (this is the reason that actually prompted the Japanese imperial army to establish “comfort stations,” after countless Chinese women were raped by Japanese soldiers during the Nanking massacre of 1937). Commanders have also feared that, unless women are easily accessible, men will turn to homosexual encounters that could affect their “manliness” or will contract venereal diseases that could impact their performance in combat. As a general rule, the more militarized the context, the more normalized prostitution becomes.

Not surprisingly, given Latin America’s infamous history of military “interventions,” many Latin American authors have targeted the military and its use of women in their works. The Peruvian 2010 Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa, for example, unsettles patriarchal beliefs justifying the liaison between the military and prostitution in his modernist novel *The Green House* (1965), where the cultural assumptions that enable women’s exploitation are exposed through a mordant look at the link between the Catholic Church and the military. Vargas Llosa has also satirized the relation between prostitution and the military in his *Captain Pantoja and the Special Services* (1973), where an army officer is given the undercover mission of creating a

squadron of prostitutes to serve the military in order to avoid the rape of local women by the soldiers (this novel was adapted for film in 2000). Like Vargas Llosa, the Colombian 1982 Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez has targeted the military and sex trafficking provocatively. García Márquez alludes to the ostensibly “natural” occurrence of soldiers paying for sex with a child sex slave in “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother” (which, incidentally, also was adapted for film in 1983). The author’s criticism of the military and the state is evident, since, throughout, government representatives aid the pimp (the Grandmother) instead of the underage victim (the young Eréndira). From these literary examples, readers understand that, despite embodying the quintessential masculine institution, the military has always made use of women’s services. As Enloe explains, the key lies in the capacity of the military to “be ensured of sufficient control over women” by the state and society in general (*Maneuvers* 45). Yet in the stories above described, the military still tries to keep a façade of decency by distancing itself from prostitution. The novel this chapter explores, on the other hand, reveals the carefully planned and officially executed strategy to traffic and prostitute colonized women for the Japanese military “without any humbug,” as one of George Orwell’s anti-imperialist characters would say (32).

3.1 Camouflaged Procurers: When the Military Runs the Brothel

Korean-born Therese Park’s first novel, *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), uncovers the active role the Japanese military played in procuring and condoning trafficking of women for prostitution during World War II. Young girls (some as young as eleven) from Korea, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, or any place Japan colonized and used as a base, were deceived/kidnapped, enslaved, tortured, and raped to serve as what were euphemistically called

“comfort women” for the Japanese imperial army.⁴⁰ Given Japan’s historically imperial relation with Korea, it is not surprising that about 80% of the “comfort women” were from this colony. These women’s fate remained silenced for decades since, by the end of the war, the majority of them were dead. But some did survive and, after forty years, began to talk, and Therese Park listened.

The author, who has lived in the US since 1966 and is now a retired cellist, confesses that she felt the urge “to give a voice” to the “comfort women” after learning about the atrocities committed against them during the screening of a documentary film:

Often, the feeble voice of the powerless turns into a thunderous roar when our inner ears are open to it. This happened to me in a summer of 1993, at the Harry S. Truman Library, while I watched a documentary film about World War II in which three former “comfort women” testified that the Japanese government had forced them into prostitution. [. . .] As each woman told of her abduction, torture, and repeated rapes in a military brothel, most of the men in the courtroom showed contempt and disgust. Only a few Japanese women wept with the plaintiffs. (“To Give a Voice” 218)

At the time of that screening, Japan still maintained an attitude of complete denial of the crimes against women committed by the military. When the evidence began to mount, Japan then claimed that these women were voluntary prostitutes working for economic benefit, shielding themselves from any responsibility through the prostitute/sex slave dilemma and its focus on

⁴⁰ Other terms were used to name these women, “such as ‘waitress’ (*shakufu*) and ‘special’ (*tokushu*) *ianfu*. In fact, the Japanese official name, *jugun ianfu*, seems to have originated with Senda Kako, a journalist who published a book titled *Jugun Ianfu* [in 1962, proving that the topic has been known and documented in Japan at least since then]. The phrase is translated into English as ‘military comfort women.’” There were other, more derogatory, terms to refer to the “comfort women,” such as “the phrase ‘public toilet’ (*kyodo benjo*)” (Soh 76-7).

female agency, which safely forecloses any debate on the topic. Years later, after consistent international pressure, especially from feminist groups, the Japanese prime minister Hashimoto Ryutaro admitted some responsibility and apologized in 1996 to the president of South Korea, Kim Yong Sam. Skeptics, however, have interpreted this gesture as a calculated political maneuver to protect trade agreements between Japan and Korea when it became impossible to keep avoiding the subject any longer (critics have observed that at the time, the Korean government did not push the matter further for fear of losing Japan as an economic ally). Japan has tried to silence the “comfort women” issue through this public apology and the establishment of private funds to compensate the victims, but, understandably, survivors demand a private admission of guilt and compensation money to come from the state, not charities.

So far, the Japanese government’s strategy seems to lie in delaying any resolution in the hopes that the survivors will die of old age. One should remember that only about 25% of the estimated 200,000 comfort women survived: many were mass murdered by the army so as not to leave traces of the crimes; others died as “collateral damage” during the war; many contracted deadly venereal diseases. To add a further layer of irony, most of the few survivors remained childless, either because their wombs were permanently harmed or because their emotional scars prevented them from forming families, so many have no relatives left who could receive any compensation. Outraged, Japanese feminists and intellectuals have fought to give the remaining “comfort women” visibility and presence, but the administration hasn’t responded as expected. For now, the Japanese government’s approach seems to be working, as the women are gradually dying of old age. Yet, arguably, delaying official reparations could end up turning the victims into emblems of the abuses committed during the war: like Freudian repression, the ghosts of the

past will continue to resurface in the nation's consciousness until the few survivors and the victims' families are acknowledged and compensated.

Thoroughly researched, the stories of Asian "comfort women" told by Park trace the hypocrisy with which the army has dealt with the crimes committed against them. In *A Gift*, we learn about the life of Soon-ah, a Korean girl abducted by the Japanese army during World War II to be forced into prostitution in "houses of relaxation" for Japanese soldiers. Together with Park, other Korean-American authors have brought attention to this topic in their fiction. Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997) and Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), for instance, have presented thought-provoking fictional narratives about "comfort women."⁴¹ Keller's *Comfort Woman* explores the psychological consequences of the atrocities through the relationship of a former "comfort woman" and her adolescent daughter, while Lee's book recounts the events from the perspective of a Korean/Japanese doctor who medically treated "comfort women" during the war and fell in love with one of them. Both works rely on the characters' memories of the past several years after the conflict while they now live in the US, thus dealing with the aftermath of the ordeals. What makes Park's novel distinct—and therefore the focus of this analysis—is that she unravels the odyssey of a "comfort woman" as it evolves, from abduction by the military to the enslavement and multiple rapes at the "comfort stations." Many of the scenes in this work indeed appear to have come straight out of the non-fictional documentary book *Silence Broken* (1999) by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson (which also became film in 2000), where Kim-Gibson gathers heart-wrenching reports from some remaining survivors.

Published by a small American feminist independent press, Park's book has not yet generated significant critical responses when compared with other authors featured in this

⁴¹ Keller also published in 2000 *Fox Girl*, a novel dealing with prostitution (this time "comfort women" servicing American GIs) in post-war Korea. For a review, see Freely.

analysis, perhaps because the author does not account for such a long literary trajectory as Mahasweta Devi or Chris Abani (after *A Gift*, Park published several articles and two novels dealing with the war and the aftermath of it). Nonetheless, *A Gift* has been well received: in 1998, it was featured in the Miami Bookfair, the Los Angeles Bookfair, and the Heartland Bookfair. Park's first novel was also selected in the reference volumes *Reading Groups Choices for 1998* and *Contemporary Authors 2001*; that same year, *A Gift* was published in Turkey, a country with a troubled history attached to its own military.

In *A Gift of the Emperor*, the military becomes pimp and consumer, so this chapter will examine the role postcolonial literature plays in describing such institutionalized systemic abuse. While I argue throughout this work that sex trafficking is condoned by ideological and repressive state apparatuses in order to maintain the hegemonic status quo undisturbed by ethical interrogations, nowhere does the relation between a legitimized institution and sex trafficking become more explicit than in this novel. Through Soon-ah's abduction and rapes, readers can interrogate the part that a conservative and patriarchal institution such as the military plays in the lives of the subaltern women depicted. Looking at the army as producer of a mythology of nation-building, this chapter explores the Althusserian ideological state apparatus that endorses militarism and justifies women's oppression—and, as Cynthia Enloe suggests, how a society (men and women) becomes complicit by supporting such militarism. In *Of War and Women, Oppression and Optimism*, Eustace Palmer explains that “there is no doubt that war always involves sexual harassment for women, and the more savage the war, the greater the sexual harassment” (8). At a time of relentless “savage” armed conflicts throughout the world, when Western and postcolonial governments still devote a massive part of their budgets to this end

alone, this chapter will look at the way art addresses the ethical implications of militarism in regards to the lives of subaltern women trafficked during war.⁴²

3.2 “We were bones to the dogs”: Portrait of a Young Comfort Woman

“On the front wall of our high school classroom hung a huge portrait of Emperor Hirohito,” begins the novel (Park, *A Gift* 1). Thus, from the start, Park immerses readers within a colonized background, with the ideological state apparatus (the school) reinforcing natural submission to the empire. We learn that Korean children sing “the Japanese national anthem” every day, “as loudly as [they] could,” and that they have been forbidden to use their native language, as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o would claim, in an effort to colonize their minds as well (Park, *A Gift* 1). For school or any official affair, the main character must use her imposed Japanese name, Keiko Omura, instead of her Korean one. A few pages into the novel, readers discover that land and property have been confiscated, leaving Koreans in dire poverty, desperate for jobs. In such context the military enters--and changes--Soon-ah’s life forever.

One morning in 1942, two delegates of the Japanese empire come to the school with the mission of recruiting young Korean girls “to tend the soldiers’ wounds, talk to them, and entertain them with [their] talents. [These girls] will be the Emperor’s special gifts to the soldiers!” (4). Two weeks later, the girls are subjected to a humiliating examination of their genitals by the military medical crew, unknown to them, to ensure their virginity. Once at home,

⁴² The amount of money devoted to the fighting of war does not merely include the money allocated before and during the actual conflict, but also the money spent in dealing with the aftermath. For example, Chris Rohlfs’s “Does Combat Exposure Make You a More Violent or Criminal Person” analyzes, among many variables, the costs the US state had to pay once the war of Vietnam was over; in his study, Rohlfs proves that the men involved in combat were far more prone to commit violent acts or crimes than civilians because of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to Rohlfs, “the social cost of the increase in violence and crime due to the Vietnam War was roughly \$65 billion”--and that is only the money spent dealing with the social consequences *after* the war (Rohlfs 273).

when Soon-ah describes this occurrence, her mother in panic hides the child and explains the truth to her: the Japanese intend to use her as a prostitute for the soldiers. Despite her mother's precautions, Japanese officials kidnap Soon-ah by force, transport her in a van with several other girls, and confine her in a ship destined for an undisclosed war zone. Soon-ah is raped several times during the trip, and, when they reach their destination, she is placed in a "comfort station" where she begins to service the soldiers as a sex slave. For the first half of the novel, she endures vicious sexual exploitation until she meets a sympathetic Japanese soldier (Sadamu) with whom she falls in love and escapes to a deserted island. In this way, Park gives her readers some respite from the violence once the girl becomes romantically involved with Sadamu and runs away with him. The introduction of the romance element allows Park to diverge from the tropes of torture and rape dominating the first part and show a more empowered side of her main female character. For the second half of the novel, Park turns the narrative into an idyllic adventure in times of war. This strategy not only lets the author craft a strong protagonist, but also makes the story more palatable (and therefore marketable) for audiences generally reluctant to read about women's victimization and hopeless endings. Soon-ah's lover is eventually killed during the war, yet the girl manages to get back home to Korea and reunite with her family. In order to keep the focus on sex trafficking and the military, this analysis will only explore the first part of the novel and those instances from the second half addressing sexual slavery.

On a closer look, readers can see that, from the beginning, Park goes to great lengths to avoid representing Soon-ah as a victim. First of all, unlike the majority of the real "comfort women" who died during the war (approximately 75% of them), she is a survivor telling her story. The girl starts her ordeal at just seventeen, but thanks to her own tenacity and the help of a man, she manages to escape alive and reunite with her family in the end. Even on the ship, while

being transported from Korea to the war zone, she distinguishes herself from the rest of the girls because of her “flawless Japanese and [her] physical beauty” (36). Intelligence and beauty increase her value as a commodity and place her in a superior position compared to the other, less educated or attractive slaves. Within the stratified and hierarchical military world, she promptly reaches the highest rank, as the captain of the ship claims her as his exclusive sex slave (enforcing a pseudo-monogamous rape-relation for the duration of the trip). By the end of the voyage, the captain offers to “recommend [her] to an officer’s House of Relaxation,” where he suggests she will “be happier”--raped by educated officers instead of common soldiers (36). For Soon-ah, this privilege does not bring any relief: “*What difference would it make? Biting dogs are all dangerous. Would I feel better when mauled by a German shepherd instead of a mutt?*” (37). The girl drops the captain’s recommendation note into the sea and ends up in an appalling “comfort station” with the rest of the women, servicing soldiers non-stop from eight in the morning till eight at night.

That Park never intended Soon-ah to resemble a victim also shows in the girl’s daring actions, even though her lower rank entails unquestioned submission to military men. Once, during a particularly brutal rape by a soldier, she talks back to the man, “gently” reminding him that he is not “supposed to kiss [her] in the mouth [and that he is] violating the rules of the military” (42). Her audacity earns her a vicious beating and the manager’s reprimand, so Soon-ah quickly learns what to avoid in order to stay alive. Through what trauma studies define as “dissociation” (that is, the “[a]lteration of consciousness [e.g. feelings of unreality] in response to extreme stress”), the girl then accepts her daily rapes and lets her mind fly away during her ordeals, detaching as much as possible from her unbearable reality (Allen 296). During a dream, the girl’s unconscious mind reminds her of her best coping mechanism: “*Remember that you are*

in a tiger's cave. Do you want to scream at the tiger and poke him? You fool! You must hide like a rabbit in a hole without even breathing" (Park, *A Gift* 91). In this way, the author reinforces that Soon-ah's acquiescence is only a strategy for survival, not an inherent trait of her personality. For the most part, Soon-ah keeps a cautious distance when other sex slaves take what she considers unnecessary risks. She tries to dissuade another "comfort woman" when she attempts to rescue a child from the forest, and discourages a friend's romantic relation with a Korean soldier passing for Japanese. Despite Soon-ah's warnings, both girls ignore her and end up predictably killed. The female protagonist feels that men are not to be trusted, so she assumes an obedient position and keeps a low profile. Half-way through her ordeal Soon-ah meets a seemingly decent Japanese soldier (Sadamu) who, claiming to be a correspondent writing a report on the girls' situation, inquires about her circumstances and offers help. Suspicious, Soon-ah remains neutral and uncooperative to protect herself.

But the girl never gives up her power completely. Regardless of the horror, Park endows her heroine with the striking ability to shift her perspective and find the emotional strength to survive: "I suddenly realized that what I had lost wasn't that much—a few kilograms of my flesh and my childish ideals. I still had my mind and my soul that kept telling me I must love myself in spite of the daily tortures I endured and never dwell on what I had lost" (92). When at some point during her enslavement she gets pregnant, the female nurse who discovers her condition mistreats her and blames her for not insisting on condom use, to which Soon-ah responds with defiance: "'I do insist', [cutting her short]. *How stupid*, [she] thought. 'Why do you think I don't insist? Because I am dying to conceive a Japanese baby?'" (74). Through the nurse, Park reflects the paradoxical tension between women who support militarism, and, in so doing, condone a patriarchal institution intrinsically hostile to them. The angry nurse, already interpellated as an

imperial subject, does not question the ethics of the military's actions and turns Soon-ah in to a more sympathetic male doctor instead. Reminiscent of Chang-rae Lee's male protagonist in his fictional version of the "comfort women" horror, this doctor empathizes with the young slave's predicament ("We must educate our soldiers first!") and performs an abortion on the seventeen-year-old girl (76). Still, even though the physician understands the abuse committed against the girls, he remains unable or unwilling to challenge the military system for which he works.

The doctor then recommends a prolonged recovery period until she stops bleeding before resuming intercourse with the soldiers, but after only seven days, Soon-ah is forced to start working. Park then gives readers a glimpse of the spectrum of activities "comfort women" were forced to perform, as this time the convalescent child must dig graves for the rotting corpses of dead soldiers. Because of her physical condition after the abortion, Soon-ah faints and ends up back at the military hospital. Here, the girl encounters Sadamu again, the Japanese correspondent who had tried to interrogate her about her imprisonment, but whom she had once ignored. This time Soon-ah feels ready to trust him. Gradually, she develops romantic feelings for the soldier, finds courage to escape the comfort station with him, and ultimately saves herself from the horrible fate of the other sex slaves.

By introducing Sadamu, a Japanese soldier who genuinely empathizes with the violated girl and (unlike the doctor) takes action to save her, Park reminds readers that, of course, not all men were evil and cruel. Yet the author unambiguously targets the Japanese emperor and the military. In Soon-ah's anti-colonial voice: "We were bones to the dogs. The soldiers would devour us piece by piece until nothing was left. This was what the Emperor had in mind, so his soldiers would conquer more countries, kill more innocent people, and become the most feared species on earth" (16). Even before becoming a sex slave during the war, Soon-ah has witnessed

a Japanese soldier killing her father and another one raping her mother. In a typically dehumanizing war context, what she and the other girls endure at the hands of these unnamed men shows that Japan's imperial policies have classed Koreans as disposable merchandise, without any sense of remorse for actions that are clearly ethically questionable.

Indeed, most of the soldiers depicted in this novel are ruthless men who do not see Soon-ah or the other "comfort women" as human beings (and Park's novel does not show some of the most violent abuses described by documentary sources based on survivors' testimonies). As the anthropologist Chunghee Sarah Soh observes, "[r]egulations stipulated that military 'comfort women' be regarded as common properties of the soldiers," so the soldiers beat and rape the girls throughout, feeling entitled to use these women's bodies for their personal satisfaction (75). Through ideological indoctrination--something that the military has traditionally excelled at--these men have dehumanized the girls just as they must dehumanize the "enemy" in order to kill and maintain a clear conscience, even when their personal experience contradicts ideological mandates.

Zizek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) illustrates this point quite convincingly. Even though Zizek's example comes from a Western context (Germany pre-World War II), it is worth citing at length because it illustrates the ideological atmosphere before the war, which we can extrapolate to compare with the ideological indoctrination the Japanese received while Korea was a colony:

Let us [. . .] take a typical individual in Germany in the late 1930s. He is bombarded by anti-Semitic propaganda depicting a Jew as a monstrous incarnation of Evil, the great-wire-puller, and so on [sex trafficker?]. But when he returns home he encounters Mr. Stern, his neighbor: a good man to chat with in

the evenings, whose children play with his. Does this everyday experience offer an irreducible resistance to the ideological construction?

The answer is, of course, no. If everyday experience offers such a resistance, then the anti-Semitic ideology has not yet really grasped us. An ideology is really “holding us” only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality – that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself. How then would our poor German react to this gap between the ideological figure of the Jew [...] and the common everyday experience of his good neighbor Mr. Stern? His answer would be to turn this gap, this discrepancy itself, into an argument for anti-Semitism: “You see how dangerous they really are? It is difficult to recognize their real nature. They hide it behind a mask of everyday appearance – and it is exactly this hiding of one’s real nature, this duplicity, that is a basic feature of the Jewish nature.” An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour. (49)

Similarly, the captain of the ship transporting Soon-ah to the “comfort station” admits to her: “You know, I always thought Chosenjin [Koreans] were ignorant, dirty, and lazy, but you make me think differently of your race. We were told that your people’s intelligence level is little higher than that of guinea pigs, but I’m finding out that isn’t true. For a Chosenjin, you seem intelligent and quite attractive. How unfortunate you were born a Korean!” (Park, *A Gift* 27). Reminiscent of Žižek’s anti-Semitism example, then, despite having first-hand knowledge of the inconsistency of his ideological stance, the captain still responds to the interpellation of empire so that he can (conveniently) take advantage of his position of power and continue to rape Soon-

ah throughout the trip. Even though the military discourages the questioning of authority and regards attempts to counteract hierarchical mandates as subversive, the captain admittedly understands that the messages he has received are false. At that point, Park suggests that rather than blaming the “lie” of the empire, this man becomes a fully responsible perpetrator who rapes Soon-ah multiple times because he bears the privilege of the imperial authority supporting him. Zizek’s illustration is doubly pertinent, since it could be argued that Germany made systematic political efforts to redress the horrors and (granted, after a period of denial) accepted full responsibility for the atrocities committed on Jewish populations. Japan seems to be moving in that direction, but it is taking time--when time is of the essence for the remaining “grandmothers” (Kim-Gibson).

3.3 “Unspeakable things” (Park, *A Gift* 27): (Not) Representing Rape

Unlike the first chapter of this dissertation--where we do not witness images of impending sexual violence because the “paralyzed” Eveline never takes the plunge into her idyllic adventure--the rest of the stories developed here show rape or the aftermath of it. It is striking, though, that most authors in this study represent rape in a similar way: as a brutal abuse of male power from the victim’s point of view, while the majority of the violent scenes tend to rely on what trauma survivors have identified as coping mechanisms, namely, out-of-body experiences of detachment, complete surrender as a method for self-preservation, or numbing of the senses.

Perhaps so as not to appall her readers, Park includes only a few lengthier passages showing Soon-ah’s rapes, but the audience is led to assume that the violations occur multiple times daily at the comfort stations. As in most of the sex trafficking narratives analyzed in this

work, when readers witness sexual violence, the author showcases the event as experienced from the victim's perception, not the rapist's or a third party. Soon-ah's first rape, for example, does not reveal much about the perpetrator other than his viciousness and his belonging to the military, suggesting that for her these men are all nameless figures to whom the state has given power to violate the women, regardless. In Soon-ah's eyes, the first rapist becomes a terrifying demon who does to her "unspeakable things" (27):

Before I could think about what to do, a huge black shadow knocked me down. I smelled alcohol on his breath. He pushed his hands into my chogori, the Korean tunic, and grabbed my breast. I screamed. The dark figure struck my face repeatedly. [. . .] I couldn't tell if the scream I heard was mine or the other girls in the room. A huge bolt struck between my legs and drilled into my flesh. It was so painful I couldn't breathe. (16)

Initially, Soon-ah fights with fierce determination to avoid the rape as she "pushed the soldier with all [her] strength, but like a tombstone, he didn't budge" (16). "I bit his arm," she says, so, in response, "[h]e slapped me hard with his free hand. I wasn't about to let him go: I bit him harder. He struck me repeatedly and I passed out" (16). After being brutalized, Soon-ah quickly understands that these men are endowed with the state authority, physical strength, and weapons to overpower her, so fighting back will only assure her death. When she is raped a second time (now by the captain of the ship), she surrenders:

He tore my tunic with both hands and pushed me on the bed. I didn't fight. I lay there. He was the conqueror, I the conquered. My fate had been decided thirty-three years ago, even before I was born, when the Japanese took over our Yi dynasty, pushing away Russians, Americans, British, and Chinese who had

drooled over our tiny peninsula, so tiny it was almost invisible on the map. [. . .]

The captain jumped on top of me, spreading the smell of alcohol all over me. I

tried to listen to the sound of the waves. It seemed the sea was shouting in protest.

The wind cried sharply, scratching the window. [. . .] Finally I heard a huge splash on the side of the ship and wished a hurricane would come. (28-9)

As Arie Shalev explains, “Woman is symbolically connected with the earth, the territory,” thus the contested prevalence of rape as a metaphor for the imperial violation (180). In the scene above described, the author intertwines colonialism and rape, as the captain becomes a synecdoche for the Japanese empire, Sonn-ah for the Korean nation. Yet the focus is clearly Soon-ah’s painful experience, though apparently detached, mediated through an environment that shouts (the sea), cries sharply and scratches (the wind), and finally destroys (the hurricane). In this way, the girl creates a distance between herself and the torturer, if only in her mind. Soon-ah explicitly refers to her survival mechanism: “Every night I was called to the captain’s cabin. I did everything the way the captain told me to do it. [. . .] I separated my mind from what was happening to me so that the physical abuse I received every day wouldn’t destroy me completely” (Park, *A Gift* 36). As for the rest of the soldiers, Soon-ah explains that each of them “hurt” her, that some of them “slapped [her] when [she] screamed,” and that she “hated them” (41). One particularly violent soldier gave her “a purple bruise on [her] face” as he struck her “again and again” with his fist; “he kept hitting [her] as if determined to beat a demon out of [her]. Each blow contorted [her] body, like the limb of a tree in a violent wind” (41). From a psychological perspective, the “unspeakable things” Soon-ah talks about reflect a common behavior, as it becomes evident that Park bases her representations of violence on coping strategies psychiatrists identify in trauma survivors. Rape victims often cannot verbalize the

situation for lack of a previous memory of abuse and the intensity triggered by the stressor (the first rape in this case), while they tend to block the traumatic event from their consciousness.⁴³

The discourse on rape to this day remains highly problematic, and not only from a representational or aesthetic point of view. In real life, raped women often face great difficulties at the time of prosecuting the crime, especially in patriarchal societies that presume that the victim's moral conduct has instigated the rape (phrases like "she deserves it for wearing skimpy clothes, going out at night, being promiscuous, etc." directly accuse the victim rather than the perpetrator). Such assumptions have permitted Japan to defile the moral stance of the "comfort women," implying that they were prostitutes before and therefore no responsibility should be placed on the government. Park's novel, nonetheless, makes it clear that what "comfort women" endured were war crimes and that international society should take a stand so that the atrocities committed do not end up lost in oblivion and impunity. Even though for the vast majority of the "comfort women" the accusation of prostitution was a blatant lie (Korean girls were in fact preferred for their cultural adherence to Confucianism and their preservation of virginity before marriage), Margaret Stetz and Bonnie B. C. Oh remind us that we need "to overturn hierarchies of gender that have ranked men above women in general, as well as 'pure' women above both rape victims and prostitutes in particular" (xii). The stigma society places upon prostitutes and rape victims contributed to the shame and hiding of the few survivors, thus erasing their presence for a long time, which has ultimately benefitted the military and the government providing the perfect cover-up for their crimes. Thanks to feminists' efforts, especially in the late 1980s, the definition of rape finally changed from an offence against female chastity to a crime and a violation of human rights. Soh explains:

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of how trauma operates, see Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996).

In comparison to the Geneva Conventions, which characterize rape as a crime against the honor and dignity of women, feminists have argued that rape is a crime of violence against women's bodies, autonomy, and integrity, comparable to other cruel and inhuman treatment. From the perspectives of feminist humanitarianism, sexual violence against women is a violation of human rights, and rape by the military in wartime, a war crime. (80)

As noted before, Park's novel chooses to emphasize a "comfort woman's" agency, so the author devises strategies to preserve her main character from the worst violence (for example, Soon-ah's good looks that attract a decent man, her astuteness in remaining obedient, her escape with her lover to a deserted island). The girl actually finds out about the most gruesome aspects of the other sex slaves' tortures and murders through a former "comfort woman" (Yun Hee) with whom she reunites by chance once the war is over. It is through this friend that Soon-ah hears that, once she escaped, the girls were transferred to Guadalcanal, where they endured the hardest torments. In a long passage worth quoting, Yun Hee explains,

A tent was set up next to [the soldiers'] and when the fighting stopped, our ordeal began. We received thirty to forty soldiers a day! They were animals, Soon-ah, demanding oral sex and trying to reach orgasm several times. When they couldn't get what they wanted, they beat us often and slashed us with daggers for no reason at all. We were surrounded by devils dancing with swords. Our wounds became infected in the humid weather and attracted maggots. [. . .]

I covered my ears. "Please stop, Yun Hee. It's too much," I said.

Yun Hee drew another sigh. "I can't believe the way you react, Soon-ah. We went through hell: we were dying, but you don't care!"

“It’s not that. It’s very hard for me to picture . . .”

“How can you picture what it was like? You weren’t there! It’s easy to cover your ears and say, ‘It’s too much. Please stop!’ Isn’t it?” Yun Hee accused me, her eyes wide and blank, almost frightening to look at. “What I am telling you is nothing compared to what we went through!” (216-7)

Yun Hee finishes her account by letting Soon-ah know that all the comfort women ended up shot by soldiers; Yun Hee escaped miraculously because they assumed she was dead.

As a stylistic choice, the author addresses the worst atrocities through a minor character barely developed in the novel, not Soon-ah. Without minimizing the caliber of the crimes, Park then tells the story from the point of view of a strong character who has (arguably) more luck than the rest of the girls because of her resilience, beauty, and intelligence, since readers can assume that Sadamu falls in love with her precisely because of those attributes--and he becomes a key participant in her escape from an assured death. In fact, it is Sadamu who later dies in a secret mission helping the Allies, while the girl manages to get back home in Korea and reunite with her mother and younger brother. By the end of the novel, the author leaves readers with a strong, evolved character who has survived and therefore becomes the true heroine of this tale.

3.4 Conclusion

Cynthia Enloe explains that “[r]ape isn’t about money and it isn’t about sex. It’s about power over women” (*Maneuvers* 118). Libby Tata Arcel, for her part, argues that “War Rape Happens Because of a Genocidal Mentality and Nationalistic Superiority” that find especially fruitful grounds to proliferate within a patriarchal institution such as the military (Shalev 190).

Ideologically, then, the possibility of violations against “comfort women” directly correlated with Japan’s imperialistic dominance:

By the mid-1930s, imperial Japan, led by extreme militarists and with the divine emperor as a leader, was positioned to “guide” all its Asian neighbors. It was convinced of the superiority of its race and the absolute moral correctness of its mission in the military conquest of other parts of Asia [, considering World War II] a holy war for imperial Japan to redeem Asia from Western imperialists. (Oh 7)

Like Germany during the Holocaust, it becomes difficult to imagine how a state-legitimized institution managed to convince the majority (granting the benefit of the doubt to some) of its recruits to accept massive rape, torture, and murder of girls from the colonies without ever questioning the practices. And yet here we see ideology in all its power. A key feature of the training military personnel receive consists in learning to dehumanize the “enemy” and lose all empathy for him/her. At the same time, individuals are highly discouraged from questioning authority. A good soldier obeys and stays with the group, while certain hypermasculine actions are regarded as necessary to reinforce the cohesion of the institution.

In the case of the “comfort women,” the Japanese imperial army considered that exerting sexual power over them promoted the soldiers’ male bonding and strengthened their masculinity. The women were simply ancillary or human “toilets,” as they were called. What the “comfort women” endured exemplifies some of the worst cases of sexual slavery to this day, as these young girls were forced to deal not only with massive rape, but also the ordeal of trying to survive in the middle of an armed combat in which they were not supposed to participate (Fic). Still, perhaps, one of the most disturbing aspects of the “comfort women” stories lies in the

subsequent official hiding of the crimes committed against them and the lack of effort to reach a fair resolution sooner, which reveals the resiliency of patriarchy today.

Ironically, after the war was over, the “comfort women” issue was suppressed by every side, despite the Allies being “well informed” of the abuses committed (Oh 14). Dai Sil Kim-Gibson notes that “[i]f Japan destroyed most of the relevant documents immediately after the war and continues to lock away whatever was spared in order to hide the sexual slavery, the Allied Forces, especially the United States, did little to seek justice for Asian atrocities committed in Japan” (7). The Allies justified their silence by maintaining that rape would be difficult to prove, an unfortunately common argument within the legal discourse on rape. “Another factor of the Allied forces’ deliberate oversight,” Oh explains, “was that they themselves had condoned the existence of prostitution stations for their own troops although, unlike those set up by the Japanese military, there were not officially recognized or regulated by the military or staffed via forced recruitment” (14). To throw the first stone at Japan would obviously complicate the Allied Forces’ moral standing. After all, these abuses against women are made possible precisely by “the latent misogyny that thrives in patriarchal societies and institutions, such as the military,” and there is ample and convincing evidence showing that the military has used women for sexual purposes (trafficked or not) regardless of the nation (Shalev 180).⁴⁴

As mentioned in the previous chapter, during the world wars the trafficking of women across the Atlantic waned as the concentrated mobilizations of men created a niche for prostitutes to serve the different nations (not only Japan) involved in military action. The two world wars in fact generated widespread sex trafficking: Japan only made it official and, thus, officially condemnable. What makes the Japanese army’s case particularly deplorable is that this

⁴⁴ See any book by Cynthia Enloe cited in this bibliography.

system of sexual slavery was meticulously organized by the state, and, by default, condoned by a majority of its citizens involved (directly or indirectly) in the war. Park's book's subject matter is indeed uncomfortable, as the fact that the military has turned into the legitimized abuser necessarily forces readers to question its role in general.⁴⁵ Anchored in a traditionally patriarchal society, Japan's imperial army was ruthless in its treatment of colonized women, as demonstrated by the testimonies of the few survivors. The atrocities committed present an extreme example of the abuse of patriarchal state power. In turn, it offers an opportunity to examine, interrogate, and rearticulate foreign policies that favor a militarism that, ultimately, destroys the most vulnerable populations on either side of the conflict (as Noam Chomsky has put it, one nation's poor fights another nation's poor to protect the interests of select elites). Unequal balances of power between so-called first and third world nations predictably assure that one side of the conflict (the poorest country) will end up paying the highest price, with the death and degradation of local populations and environments.

Thus, an analysis of sexual slavery during World War II that focuses only on Japan--without disregarding its obvious culpability--runs the risk of staying within a myopic discourse that ignores practices against women that the military has traditionally relied on. In this respect, Cynthia Enloe suggests that "[p]erhaps more than in any previous era, we are living at a time when women can draw on their own experiences with the military to expose the military for the contradictory and patriarchal institution it is and always has been" (*Does Khaki Become You?* 220). Enloe further contends that "[t]here are times [. . .] when the military's contradictions around women grow so acute that they threaten to expose not just the weakness of the military as an institution, but the hypocrisy running through the entire idea of 'national security'" (215).

⁴⁵ A recent article in the *Guardian* uncovers troublesome details about rape within the US military, stating that "[a] female soldier in Iraq is more likely to be attacked by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire" (Broadbent).

Therese Park's novel, above all, invites us to reflect and question. The Japanese military orchestrated massive rape with the official consent of the government, so what lesson can we learn from these women's ordeals? Margaret Stetz notes the importance of paying attention to their plight: "To consider [. . .] the 'comfort women' as having any legacy to give is to begin by assigning value to women who have been designated, in multiple contexts, as without value. They were chosen for systematic rape, in the first place, because they were seen as worthless and, afterward, defined as worthless, because they had been raped" (xii). At the same time, the "comfort women" of World War II invite audiences to ponder on what happened partly because the exploiters are not marginal or obscure pimps and traffickers from a third-world country (the usual suspects), but a "civilized" government through one of its most symbolic institutions, the military. With this in mind, and after the initial moral outrage this issue provoked internationally, societies should perhaps start debating where national funds are allocated and consider diplomatic alternatives to wars, without unquestioningly assuming military interventions to be the best approach to conflict resolution.

Finally, it is important to remember that, despite their circumstances, many of these women fought to overcome their situation and stay alive. Jon G. Allen explains that "[v]ictim and survivor are vastly different perspectives on the same traumatic reality [but] *Both* are true," depending on where the narrative constructs its focus (111). This could be the reason why Park chose to show a resilient female character telling the story from her point of view, as a tribute to the courage of those women who managed to survive and to honor those who could not escape and died. Granted, the majority of these women were abducted, forced to prostitute themselves, and most of them perished in the process, but Chunghee Sarah Soh warns us that "the categorical representation of 'comfort women as sex slaves denies—however unintentionally—the

remarkable human agency exercised by some of the ‘comfort women’ against gendered oppression in their adverse social conditions. The life stories of some survivors clearly reveal their independent spirit and risk-taking actions” (81). Like Soon-ah, the remaining “grandmothers,” as Kim-Gibson calls them in *Silence Broken*, are teaching us a lesson on the strength of the human spirit, and the dangers of increasing militarization left unchecked and unquestioned by any nation’s citizens. Indeed, at the end of the World War II, Korean people hoped for the peace and progress decolonization would supposedly bring. But Soon-ah’s last words in the novel (“Omma [mother], let’s move to the south”) ominously anticipate the division and conflict waiting to unfold (Park, *A Gift* 238). For other colonies, as will be analyzed in the following chapter through the case of India, decolonization also meant partition, violence, and, for those women caught up in the most abject poverty, sex trafficking.

**4 Sex Trafficking, Development, and the National Government in Mahasweta Devi's
"Douloti the Bountiful"**

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

W. B. Yeats, "Leda and the Swan"

This chapter begins where the previous one ends: with the end of World War II in 1945, India's independence in 1947, and the birth of Mahasweta's character Douloti in 1948. After hundreds of years under British domination, liberation from colonial powers was finally accomplished. But, was it? Looking back from a contemporary perspective, Mahasweta Devi's story "Douloti the Bountiful" (1995) clearly shows that decolonization and independence have only touched those in the superstructure. For a majority stuck at the base, independence never occurred.

In 2011, reporting for *The Guardian*, Owen Bowcott noted that with India becoming an ever-stronger world player--"a country rapidly developing into an economic super-power"--it

may look surprising to read that “India is the fourth most dangerous country” in the world for women to live (Bowcott).⁴⁶ The journalist observed that India’s appearance on the infamous list “was unexpected” (Bowcott). But while India’s elites are certainly enjoying the fruits of unparalleled development, for an overwhelming number of poor women (like Douloti in Mahasweta Devi’s story), the country has become “extremely hazardous because of the subcontinent’s high level of female infanticide and sex trafficking” (Bowcott). In fact, “India’s central bureau of investigation estimated that in 2009 about 90% of [sex] trafficking took place *within* the country and that there were some 3 million prostitutes, of which about 40% were children [my emphasis]” (Bowcott).

That India keeps the dirty work of sex trafficking mostly “at home” instead of internationally does not significantly alter the circumstances for the victims; some details vary, but the essence—slavery, torture, and violence against women--remains the same. As it will be analyzed in the following chapter, when trafficked women leave their countries, they automatically become illegal residents involved in prostitution, in other words, criminals subject to prosecution and deportation. Yet when trafficking occurs within national boundaries, the dynamic is as perverse, if not more so, because the crime tends to be carried out with complete impunity when government officials or the police are involved. Sociological data proves that the police often participate in exploitation of trafficked victims, either by utilizing their services for free in exchange for ignoring the illegal activities of pimps, or through lack of proper knowledge of how to deal with a victim of sex trafficking, persecuting the woman (a prostitute) instead of the criminals. Often, corrupt police officers return the girls to their local pimps when they escape, and their treason does not go unpunished (reputable sources describe the actual tortures

⁴⁶ The devastated, war-ridden, Afghanistan predictably leads the ranking (Bowcott).

inflicted on such women).⁴⁷ Trafficking victims themselves contribute to their invisibility by their reticence to come forward and ask for help given that the traffickers' generally threaten to harm them or their families. Yet the presence of these sex slaves is not unknown to local governments. Quite the contrary, since the government, "eager to join the globalization band wagon, makes use of existing norms of female subordination in society in order to provide cheap labor demanded by new forces of globalization, thereby implicitly or explicitly aiding and abetting the female sex trafficking" (Samarasinghe 57).⁴⁸

The media's fascination with uncovering high-profile cases where judges or politicians are implicated in sex trafficking (by funding it, overlooking it, consuming sex from trafficked women or children, etc.) shows the degree of awareness of the issue the public has reached. In fact, trafficking in many societies has become an open secret, an abject reality constantly threatening to come to the surface, so many governments prefer to look the other way and tolerate it because--as this work argues--it allows the economic system to continue to reproduce itself. To disregard ethical issues revolving around sexually exploited subaltern women becomes easier, even "necessary." Granted, this silencing of the illicit activities does not involve everybody in a government, but sex trafficking presents so many inherent complexities that even if some well-intentioned local authorities try to combat it, the approach has frequently failed

⁴⁷ In *Female Sex Trafficking in Asia: The Resilience of Patriarchy in a Changing World*, Vidyamali Samarasinghe explains that "The Human Rights Task Force on Cambodia (1995) has listed several types of torture and inhumane treatment perpetrated on sexually exploited young women in Cambodia," but traffickers' modus operandi is relatively similar everywhere (114). "Such maltreatment includes beatings with wires and sticks, electric shocks, torture with acid, forced confinement in locked rooms, forced intake of drugs, forced sex and lack of access to medical treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS" (114). Indeed, the author notes that "female prostitution is a virtual death sentence to sex workers because of the threat of HIV/AIDS," or severe depression and suicide (114).

⁴⁸ Here comes to mind the similar case of Colombia under former president Uribe, whose government applied unbound free market policies in compliance with IMF requirements, benefitting the elite of society at the expense of a vast majority of the poor population. His government has also been notoriously questioned because of the human rights violations under his mandate.

because the laws seem contradictory at best, for example, forbidding prostitution on the one hand, but demanding health checks for women working in prostitution (the “necessary evil”) on the other.

To this day, patriarchy remains one of the biggest barriers to curbing sex trafficking; its “stubborn resilience [. . .] over time and space has been instrumental in creating new spaces for the continuous supply of women and children to feed the streams of trafficking into the commercial sex industry” (Samarasinghe 163). As Samarasinghe notes, “in a culture where commercial sex with under-age girls does not seem to register many raised eyebrows or shock, the predominantly male law makers, judicial officers or the police may not give priority to ensure that effective laws are passed and implemented to curb sex trafficking”; at the same time, “[h]igh officials are also known to be customers, making a mockery of the system that expects the government to effectively take action against those who use victims of sex trafficking” (Samarasinghe 117). Much of the work, then, stays in the hands of NGOs, but, in spite of their commendable efforts, the helpfulness of some of their rescue operations has been questioned. At times, some “saviors” have shown more concern for imparting the religious or political ideologies espoused by the organization than for the actual well-being of the survivor; other times, the noble intentions end up diluted by excessive government bureaucracy and no dramatic improvement occurs (as in the story under analysis).⁴⁹ The reality is that for each rescued victim, there is a pool of thousands to be trafficked as replacements, which highlights the importance of

⁴⁹ This criticism, of course, only intends to acknowledge the downside of some NGOs’ approaches. But the majority of these organizations have had a tremendously positive impact in the lives of sex trafficking survivors (see www.tapestri.org).

addressing structural causes rather than resorting to temporary palliatives—here the role of the national government comes to the forefront.⁵⁰

In the case of India, violence against women, particularly those from the lower strata of society, continues to be condoned and justified by some sectors of the government, as intellectual leftist activists such as Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy have persistently denounced. Roy argues: “Every ‘democratic’ institution in this country has shown itself to be unaccountable, inaccessible to the ordinary citizen, and either unwilling or incapable of acting in the interest of genuine social justice” (qtd. in Lazarus 32). At the same time, it would be impossible to analyze sex trafficking outside cultural parameters such as the caste system with its rigid hierarchies, religions that assume the lower status of women, or the impoverishment that those at the base still suffer after Independence in 1947.

From an economic standpoint, the trafficking of Indian tribal women that Mahasweta Devi depicts in her story does not result simply from poverty, but from the gendered economic inequality prevalent in post-independence India. Andrea Di Nicola argues that it would be a mistake to assume “that poverty is the sole cause of the supply of sexual services” (Di Nicola 5). During the early 1990s, for example, South Asia experienced rapid economic growth because of the liberal policies promulgated by the IMF and incorporated by the local government (privatization of state companies, cuts in government expenses in public health, education, social welfare, etc.), all measures that directly affected the underprivileged (Kara 29). The chasm

⁵⁰ The case of Cambodia offers an interesting example of how a government can contribute to female exploitation. The boom of tourism, fostered by the World Bank and the IMF, has generated an extremely lucrative industry around sex tourism and sex trafficking. In this respect, Samarasinghe remarks that, while prostitution is illegal in Cambodia, the “monitoring of the movements of sex offenders [and] their apprehension and prosecution [have] low priority since any aggressive action on the part of the government would have an effect in slowing down nearly one quarter of sex tourists resulting in loss of revenues for the government” (117). The Philippines also presents a scenario comparable to the rest of South Asia, where the “[p]atriarchy of the state seems to intersect with gender and class. The elitist attitude of the patriarchal state, at best seems to be only marginally concerned about the plight of women of the underclass who are the most likely to seek employment in risky work overseas” (158).

between rich and poor widened to an extreme, allowing the perfect scenario for slave traffic to flourish locally: while many to this day barely survive on less than \$2 a day, the incomes of the middle and upper classes “have soared,” with India boasting more billionaires than the United Kingdom (30). Of course, not only Indian women suffer the consequences of poverty, so corruption becomes a viable option for some local individuals (men and women) to exploit them. Local pimps then sell the girls to those men who can afford them, proving that sex trafficking thrives in such uneven economies where women and children end up trapped in “deathly brothels” because of their loan obligations, while “males have more money than before with which to buy sex from slaves” (Kara 30). It is not surprising that given Mahasweta Devi’s deep commitment to social causes in her native India, one of her stories in *Imaginary Maps* (1995) particularly addresses female sex traffic.⁵¹

As an author and activist, Mahasweta plays a central part in today’s Indian literary circles, having received both national and international awards for her “closely intertwined” creative writing and social action (Bhattacharya 1003). Her work springs from her careful research and acute empathy with the situation of the oppressed in India; thus, local critics have called her “that lone voice of conscience which plays such a crucial role in a weak society like ours” (Bhattacharya 1003). The writer has maintained an openly socialist agenda throughout her career in the hopes of improving the lives of the subaltern group she writes about because she wants to help the tribals unite and organize to achieve social change in India. According to her, “solidarity is resistance” (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow* xiii).

⁵¹ In the body of this work, I will refer to the author as Mahasweta, echoing Spivak’s calling her such in accordance with the Indian tradition of referring to public well-known figures by their first name.

Regarding her reception outside India, despite Mahasweta's well-established trajectory as a Bengali writer with undeniable talent (best exemplified in the dialogic quality of her short stories), Gayatri Spivak's role as the most recognized of the translators and critics of her work is arguably the reason for the author's welcome to the World Literature canon taught in Western universities. Mahasweta's frequently anthologized stories "Breast-Giver" and "Draupadi" (analyzed in Spivak's *In Other Worlds*) have brought her name to Westerners' awareness together with postcolonial favorites such as Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy, whose writing styles have made the postcolonial Other more palatable to Western tastes.

While Mahasweta's intended audience is primarily local, her dedication at the beginning of *Imaginary Maps* ("For all the Indigenous people in the world") acknowledges the possibility of "worlding" her work transnationally, and explains Spivak's interest in disseminating it in Western academia. Spivak's analysis of Mahasweta's stories differs from the author's own nationalistic take on India's tribal struggles, yet Spivak's examination of "Douloti" becomes fruitful for the purpose of this analysis of sex trafficking in a global context characterized by inequality, debt, and usury because of the critic's acknowledged interest in "looking at [the] women who are being shafted by post-modern capitalism" (*The Postcolonial Critic* 11). In *Globalization and Postcolonialism*, Sankaran Krishna remarks that

Spivak's work has a keen eye for the situation of the subaltern/tribal woman as the figure of the doubly oppressed by discourses of both imperialism and nationalism. The culture of imperialism that produces both the colonizer and the middle-class nationalist is one that excludes the subaltern for whom the discourse of postcolonial development and nation building appears as no more than the latest form of domination. Similarly the discourse of the working class, and its

emancipatory narrative of socialism, is one that excludes the subaltern tribals, especially their women. Existing in a peripheral economy characterized by bonded labor, forced migration, and patriarchy, the subaltern tribal woman emerges in the lowest substratum of all. (Krishna 102-3)

Mahasweta herself notices the parallels between the Indian tribals and Native Americans in the US, both groups deprived of land and rights by those in power. Reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's radical Marxist position, Mahasweta argues that "as far as the tribals or the oppressed are concerned, violence is justified. When the system fails in--justice, violence is justified" (*Imaginary Maps* xviii).

The tribals in India, who constitute one-sixth of the total population of the country, encompass one of the most vulnerable communities, with few or no options to survive. They are treated as virtual pariahs in their society; they remain outside the caste system and, as Spivak explains, their animism "does not even qualify as a religion" ("Woman in Difference" 109). Deprived of land for their sustenance after the land reforms, they have no other alternative than to become bonded laborers, since bond-slavery remains to this day the only means of repaying debts. But "[b]elow this," Spivak argues, "is bonded prostitution, where the girls and women abducted from bonded labor or *kamiya* households are thrust together as bodies for absolute sexual and economic exploitation" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 82). Such practice has become commonplace among destitute tribals, Mahasweta explains. "Women after or before marriage are taken away when husband or father has borrowed money from the money-lending upper caste. They are taken straight to brothels in the big cities to work out that sum. And the sum is never repaid because the account is calculated on compound interest" (*Imaginary Maps* xix). Spivak further argues: "Woman's body is thus the last instance in a system whose general

regulator is still the loan: usurer's capital, imbricated, level by level, in national industrial and transnational global capital" ("Woman in Difference" 82).

Mahasweta's carefully researched story "Douloti the Bountiful" (from now on referred to as "Douloti") gives readers a raw account of the struggles of tribal women after India's independence, unambiguously highlighting the complicity of political and economic institutions in trafficking and profiting from them.⁵² In her strong and defiant language, Mahasweta makes it clear to the audience (an Indian audience, she insists) that decolonization after independence in 1947 never touched those at the bottom of society, the tribals, as the new local governments continue to disregard and exploit their situation. In fact, liberal economic measures in West Bengal with their "structural adjustment [plans have] left locals poorer than they were before the reform began in the 1980s" (Marx 10). In an ironic move, Mahasweta objects that, after independence, the "government of India," rather than help the tribals, "has pauperized" them (*Imaginary Maps* x).⁵³

4.1 "I was born the year after independence": Whose?

The author crafts this tale after actual events she witnessed in Palamu, one of the poorest districts in the state of Bihar, where she met a bond slave whose back had been crushed by a cart after being forced by his landlord to pull it in place of an animal. During her research, Mahasweta questioned the landlord about his decision, only to hear him respond: "A man can be wasted, a bullock cannot" (*Imaginary Maps* xix). This incident and the meeting of a "skeletal

⁵² This is the second story in Mahasweta's *Imaginary Maps* (1995), translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

⁵³ Predictably, this story has provoked mixed reactions in India, as the author portrays the government representatives responsible for Douloti's abuse in a far from flattering light; its characters' actions repulse some of Mahasweta's sympathetic readers and aggravate others who find their representations uncomfortably close to home.

girl in the local hospital who could only pronounce the name of her village and nothing else” prompted the narrative (xx). In this story, Douloti is Crook Ganori Nagesia’s fourteen-year-old daughter. Like all the tribals in the village, Crook Ganori Nagesia is indebted for life to his landlord. After Crook Ganori Nagesia becomes crippled and therefore useless—that is, no more surplus value can be extracted out of his body—Douloti turns into the only means of repaying his bonded debt. A procurer pretending to be a philanthropist from an upper caste (Paramananda), in complicity with Ganori’s landlord, deceives the family through a suspicious marriage proposal to Douloti. He pays Crook Ganori Nagesia’s debt, removes the girl from her community, and traffics the unsuspecting victim to the city as a sex slave. The tribals can smell the dangers of such dubious miracle (“When does a Brahman marry a Nagesia girl?”), but, in a world without options or justice, it matters little (50). In this way, a debt of three hundred rupees is transferred to the daughter, who will have to pay it through her enforced prostitution as a “kamiya whore.” Douloti thus becomes uprooted from her support system to be raped daily because of an impossible balance. Through this character, Mahasweta reflects the situation of countless “superexploited” Indian women, symptomatic preys of a patriarchal, neocolonial economic system driven to extract unlimited profit even at the expense of a human body.

For the first couple of years, the girl starts with one regular customer, which helps her maintain her health, but she ends up servicing about forty men a day once her single customer loses interest in her exhausted body. After consistent, brutal rape, Douloti’s first customer complains to the brothel’s manageress: “These goods are thread bare now,” implying that her body should be disposed of and replaced (77). Later on, Douloti will be consumed by countless men who break her spirit and destroy her health. She wonders, “Can a kamiya woman leave?

Never” (70). The only way out seems destitution or death, as another sex slave warns her, “I am a kamiya-whore, I’ll of course be kicked out when my carcass shrivels” (68).

Yet even though Douloti is isolated from her community and trapped by ever-proliferating debt, looking closer at her depiction readers can see that the author grants her main character dignity, intelligence, and strength. The young girl initially manages to (minimally) play the system to her advantage. One day she asks one of her clients for some regular extra money which she begins to hide for herself in the hope of gathering enough to pay for her freedom and come back to Seora Village with her family. She then gets some control over her meager finances, yet, later on, that money will buy bread to feed another sex slave’s son in one of the most poignant scenes in this tough and unsentimental world, exposing Douloti’s inherent generosity and communal values. Douloti also offers money to her uncle Bono in a random encounter between the two, which moves her uncle to tears. Yet those are among the few glimpses of light in “Douloti.” In keeping with the real-life scenario Mahasweta witnessed, the young sex slave finds no “Sadamu-like” savior or outlet. Instead, what readers feel is hopelessness within a world dominated by social injustice and violence against women. Like Soon-ah in the previous chapter, the girl endures unbearable violations, but unlike Park’s female protagonist, for Douloti there is no escape.

Thus, in “Douloti,” Mahasweta addresses the contested issue of third-world female agency provocatively, since the author mainly targets the exploitative social and economic web in which Douloti is entangled without offering readers a postcolonial heroine. Unlike other strong female characters she has developed in stories like “Draupadi” or “The Hunt,” where Dopdi and Mary Oraon (the main protagonists) end up claiming their power in one of Homi Bhabha’s moments of “ambivalence” that subversively destabilize the colonizer, Douloti’s

environment is so constrained that she cannot move beyond her limited circumstances, perhaps disappointing the audiences' expectations of encountering an empowered third-world woman (I utilize this general definition—third-world woman—with awareness of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's cautioning against any monolithic representation of them; in this case, I am resorting to Spivak's "strategic essentialism" for the purpose of illustrating my point).

In "The Hunt," Mary Oraon is harassed by a government contractor who demands sex with her. Mary manages to deceive him by deferring the encounter to the night of a tribal celebration in which the women hunt for animals. During the hunt ritual, Mary kills the contractor with her knife and saves her honor, in this way escaping an assured rape. But readers should notice that Mary still lives among the tribals, which grants her the protection of her group. Mary kills her potential rapist in her territory, through the celebration of her tribal customs. In Douloti's case, her kin would have offered her the possibility of some protection, but, as Spivak points out, "Mahasweta moves us further [. . .] to a space where the family is broken [The] family is the first step towards collectivity. Mahasweta moves us to a space where the family, the machine for the socialization of the female body through affective coding, has itself been broken and deflected ("Woman in Difference" 111).

In "Draupadi," Dopdi has been captured by the military for her involvement in allegedly subversive activities against the government. After a seemingly formal interrogation, an intelligence specialist orders her brutal rape as a way to "break her," while remaining at a safe distance during the execution of the dirty work (as addressed in Chapter Three through the analysis of sex trafficking and the military, Mahasweta's "Draupadi" reflects how rape is often

used as a war weapon).⁵⁴ When, at the end of the story, Dopdi finally meets the officer who ordered her desecration, she refuses to wear clothes, thus compelling the man to see his “work” and feel fear for the first time in front of a naked woman. Dopdi does stand before him bravely in the closing scene. Yet it could be argued that, in Dopdi’s case, female agency comes from a literary device utilized by the author, rather than from genuine empowerment of the female peasant. After all, Dopdi’s last display of agency while confronting this officer shows her in a clear position of moral superiority, but readers cannot miss that it is the author who manipulates Dopdi’s agency by ending the story where she does because, probably, Dopdi will continue to be tortured to death, especially after defying and humiliation her abuser.

Unlike these two characters, Douloti remains a victim from every angle at all times because “Mahasweta does not represent [her] as an intending subject of resistance” (Spivak, “Woman in Difference” 125). Douloti is trapped and she has no Ulises to save her from exploitation as did the fourteen-year-old Eréndira in Gabriel García Márquez’s tale of sex trafficking, “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother,” where García Márquez resorts to high doses of magic realism to dilute in the narrative the shocking treatment of the sex slave. In this story, García Márquez describes a young orphan, Eréndira, who lives in the custody of her grandmother. When Eréndira accidentally burns her grandmother’s house, the woman forces the child into prostitution until the girl can pay the cost of the damages. One of her clients, Ulises, falls in love with the girl, so she convinces him to murder her grandmother. After a failed attempt, Ulises manages to kill the grandmother, while the girl escapes alone to live forever blissful and free. But we see no romantic saviors or happy

⁵⁴ During military armed conflicts, with their high doses of nationalism and chauvinism on every side, war rape has often been utilized as a systematic weapon against men, more than against women, as societies that regard women the property of men, deem rape a violation of men’s status.

endings in “Douloti.” The suggestion that the tribal girl has become a dehumanized object to be consumed until exhaustion leaves a sour taste in readers’ mouths.

As for the demand side, Douloti’s customers in the brothel are mainly government contractors, inspectors, and the police— an array of state-sanctioned heterosexual masculinities who draw the life out of her body with impunity. When a friend of Douloti’s procurer admonishes, “There will be a change of government and the *police* will get you,” Paramananda [the procurer] is quick to respond: “Who will get me brother? The police *officer*, the railway inspector, who can stay away from Rampiyari’s house [the brothel]?” (Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps* 53). The perversity of Douloti’s predicament, then, is double because not only is she helpless before her daily rapes, but those committing the crimes keep her abuse in the shadows when they in fact belong to the state apparatus expected to protect her. In the afterword to Mahasweta’s *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak plainly calls these individuals “the worst product of post-coloniality, the [Indians who use] the alibis of Development to exploit the tribals and destroy their life-system” (203). Mahasweta’s restrained but angry tone in the story reveals her disgust with corrupt government officials who draw blood from the tribal women subjected to their exploitative businesses.

Douloti’s first client Latia, for example, is a “highly trusted government contractor. All the *bridges* that he has built on the Kurunda, Seil, Kora, Rohini, the little rivers in the area, have collapsed about twice. Latia leaves the scene of action with the money and finally another contractor builds the bridge” (65). At the brothel, he has killed a sex slave before, raping her during her convalescence from an enforced abortion and then bribing the police to evade the law without consequences. Mahasweta describes his first raping of Douloti in animalistic terms: “Douloti is bloodied many times all through the night. Finally her sobbing and entreaties could

no longer be heard. But the ‘grunt grunt’ of a rooting pig could be heard” (58). All that happens in the brothel room looks “natural,” as the narrator remarks, “Douloti is afraid of Latia’s naturalness” (58). As for the procurer, he has “entered this room [...] many a time. He has completed exchange with the rapist without glancing once at the violated, naked harijan woman’s helpless body. This behavior is natural for him,” too (58). Once again, the narrator warns, “Douloti is afraid of Paramananda’s naturalness” (58). By this transaction, Douloti ceases to be a human being to become an expendable commodity. From an Althusserian stance, the “naturalness” of this crime does not even merit a question in the abusers’ minds, who have been ideologically interpellated into their roles as promoters of capital and development at any cost. In their minds, a debt is a debt and it must be paid--even if the only means of repaying it is a disposable female body. When the contractor needs more money for his land projects, he readily brings government officials to the whorehouse to “consume” sex slaves, thus forcing the girls to lubricate the smoothly functioning engine of local agri-capitalism. The girls have become a physical space subject to men’s abuse: “The boss has turned them into land. The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop. They are all Paramananda’s kamiya” (59). Throughout, Mahasweta resorts to the land trope in connection with the tribal girls’ bodies, suggesting that their youth, just like India’s resources, has turned into a commodity ready for unlimited appropriation.

Interestingly, the race of the abusers does not play a major role in the exploitation here. Unlike Mara’s mainly white German clients in Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon* (analyzed in the following chapter), those who pay for sex in “Douloti” are men from a different social class, not a different race. In *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks observes that in Indian society “the physical ideal functions as a form of preference, as

an aesthetic choice, without the ontological and legal significance it has acquired in the West [. . .] Differences are marked rather by economic status, but even more by one's last name and regional and linguistic affiliations"; the critic further explains that "caste difference is always marked by cultural accoutrements such as clothing, dialect, and one's name, but rarely, if ever, by bodily marks" as opposed to "wholly racialized" societies such as the US or Europe (1). In the story under analysis, the sexual violence tribal women endure from Indian men coincides, for example, with the representation of sexual abuse that will be explored in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, where a black sex slave is "consumed" by white men who project onto her their fantasies of raping orientalized "exotic" colored women (brutality, mutilation, humiliation), suggesting that in India both patriarchy and class play a key part in the impunity with which girls like Douloti are violated. Societies with strong patriarchal values tend to foster abuse against women, since it has been normalized by cultural traditions, and thus it is harder for women to escape or seek any compensation through legal means. For them, too, the oppression becomes natural.⁵⁵

Despite their very different writing styles, when facing the challenge of representing sexual violence, Mahasweta, like Therese Park, depicts Douloti's rapes through tropes of torture, pain, and detachment revealed from the point of view of the girl. Akin to Soon-ah's initial rapes, the first time Douloti is brutalized, she has an out-of-body experience: "Are the spectator Douloti and the tortured Douloti becoming one? What is Latia [her first customer] doing now? What is this? The two Doulotis became one and a desperate girl's voice cracked out in terrible pain" (Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps* 58). By describing the scene through Douloti's distanced gaze, and not her abuser's or a third party's, the author avoids delving into what could easily become

⁵⁵ For example, the abortion of female babies has become an unfortunate popular trend in India nowadays, especially among upper classes with more access to pre-natal screening.

borderline erotica or pornography. Mahasweta utilizes free indirect discourse, weaving together the omniscient narrator's and Douloti's perspectives on the scene, thus plunging the reader into the ordeal the girl is experiencing and not allowing her audience to sit as mere voyeuristic spectators. At the same time, this strategy allows the author to represent a traumatic event that would probably be impossible for Douloti's consciousness to formulate in words, given that she has no previous memory of sexual abuse (or sexual experience at all) and she seems to be in a state of shock, pain, and horror. What we witness is torture, not sex.

The author makes it clear that Douloti is powerless against these predatory violations by the "lust-struck animal that digs and tears her every day" (60). Other sex slaves keep "getting burnt by cigarettes" and the men "eat their flesh in a crazed way" (66). But in a seventy-five page story, these graphic descriptions could not fill together one page because Mahasweta's lens focuses on the structural violence of these tribal women's situation above all, while she carefully manipulates "the ethics of seeing" for her audience (Sontag, *On Photography* 3). The writer meets the difficult challenge of representing rape with a few powerful scenes of brutal torment, but, consistent with her style, avoids melodrama completely and always presents the violence from the point of view of the desecrated disposable woman. Through Douloti's rapes, Mahasweta also calls attention to the root causes that enable the violence to continue underground in India, thus forcing readers (her Indian audience above all) to consider a local cultural context that must change if bonded labor and prostitution are to be actually ended. With little ambiguity, this story seems to ask readers directly: now that you know, what are you going to do about it?

4.2 Sex Trafficking and the National Government: When the Sow Eats her Own Farrow

While the obvious exploiters in this tale are Indian men, Mahasweta's story can transcend national boundaries. The author not only points fingers at the corrupt government, but her context is also global since it becomes clear that the economic measures imposed on postcolonial India have bred this patriarchal state elite perpetuating old colonial practices (the bondslavery system is in fact a legacy of the British administration, apparently abolished but conveniently tolerated). As Vidyamali Samarasinghe explains:

Women or men cannot be incorporated into the processes of globalization without the cooperation of the respective states. The debate is whether there is an imminent 'demise' of the state overpowered by the supremacy of global capital and markets or whether the state is a willing partner in its own 'transformation' and actively accommodates the demands of global capital. (See Cerny, 1997; Mittland and Johnston, 2000; Stiglitz, 2002). Indeed, as Chin observes[,], as of now, any anticipation of a possible demise of the state is premature (Chin, 2000). Mittleman (2000) asserts that while no state is untouched by globalization, the majority of states in the South play a 'courtesan role' to global capital, by pandering to the demands of those who are willing to invest in their countries, especially in order to have access to cheap labor. Hence, it is becoming increasingly evident, that instead of an imminent demise of the state, economic power of the state in the South is boosted by its partnership with global capital (Chin, 2000). (52)

In "Douloti," the government's responsibility and foreign capital's complicity are visibly exposed because those who brutalize Douloti's body are the government's contractors working

under the new capitalist reforms that will supposedly aid in India's development. When Douloti wonders where all her clients come from, another sex slave informs her: "New roads are being built around Madhpura, and the *cement* work is going up near the river. There are a thousand contractors and workers there" (Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps* 77). The narrator denounces: "The social system that makes Crook Nagesia a kamiya is made by men" (61)—and those men who carve Douloti's commodified anatomy stand for an economic system that extracts surplus value out of a disposable female body while acting in the interest of preserving local and foreign capital with the blessings of the "development" mantra.

The inconsistencies of this free market model have been analyzed by critics of capitalism such as Eric Hobsbawm or Noam Chomsky, who argue that countries in the global North actually maintained some degree of state intervention and protectionism, especially in the nineteenth century, to allow their own economies to thrive while unbound free market policies were imposed on third-world countries, destroying their abilities to compete—of course, all with the help of (corrupt) government elites in the third world. Indeed,

[w]hile the apologists for developing countries who claim that governments of such countries face an 'imminent demise' ignore the fact that it is the governments who enthusiastically embrace economic aspects of globalization while either conveniently ignoring the negative impact of such policies and/or being reluctant to redress such problems because they happen to [affect] mostly women who do not have a voice. (Samarasinghe 117)

Let us not forget that the Indian government Mahasweta describes represents a continuation of state power after hundreds of years of colonial exploitation at the hands of England. As Frantz Fanon or Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o would argue, these servile puppet leaders

maintain the psychological structures of the old colonial regime, thus exploitation has only changed hands and bourgeois inequality remains intact. “When the British left,” Mahasweta stresses, “they left our brains colonized, and it remains like that” (*Chotti Munda and His Arrow* xiii). The men here depicted uncover a net of endemic corruption so pervasive that readers may be left wondering how any social change can possibly be achieved when the system seems utterly decayed to its very foundations. In this respect, Shelly Wright explains that “[t]he decolonization process has not improved the lives of most [people] in the developing world arguably because the concept of self-determination that was adopted is geared towards servicing First and Third World male elites and their own goals of political, military and economic ascendancy” (207). Wright further contends that “Third World countries, while given apparent political self-determination, are increasingly caught in neo-colonialism of global capitalism and militarization” (207).

The counter-hegemonic representatives of this corrupt democracy Mahasweta describes (embodied in this story in the Catholic Father Bomfuller, the bond-slavery abolitionist schoolteacher Mohan, and the tribal turned socialist Bono) have blatantly failed Douloti. The priest only manages to collect data and compile a report on the magnitude of bonded labor, providing more information for a government that already knows about the problem. Bomfuller and Mohan then perform the joke of a democratic system ineffective at best. Zizek would argue that, in fact, their ideological counter-narrative actually invigorates the current capitalist model by allowing some apparent room for opposition but maintaining deep structures untouched, which Mahasweta’s rhetorical question at the end of the story leaves very clear. “Douloti” shows that these women, kept invisible because of the nature of their work (prostitution), are sucked into a capitalist machine benefitting those lucky participants in government projects—projects

from which the poor will probably not see a single benefit, quite the contrary, because this “development” comes at the expense of their environment, their health, their bodies. Echoing Julia Kristeva, then, Douloti becomes the “object” of the neoliberal system that needs her, but denies her subjectivity or even presence.⁵⁶

More worryingly, Mahasweta’s story uncovers that the government of India knows of Douloti’s injustice, but policy-makers intentionally and conveniently keep her invisible, so even if she tried to speak her abuse, this subaltern woman would not be heard. She is allowed no escape and, once evicted from the whorehouse, her prospects will not improve; contemplating her future, Douloti thinks: “A three hundred rupee loan becomes infinite in eight years. The boss has raised more than forty thousand rupees wringing this body of mine. Still I owe. There will be a loan as long as my body is consumable. Then I’ll leave as a beggar” (Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps* 87). But she never gets that far. With her body “thread bare” and without any money, not even for the bus fare to get back home, Douloti is thrown out of the whorehouse, so she walks in the hope of seeing her family again before dying. On her way back to her village, Douloti collapses at a school, ironically, over the map of India the school teacher has drawn to celebrate the anniversary of India’s Independence:

Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labor* spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia’s tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs.

Today, on the fifteenth of August [India’s Independence Day], Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan [the abolitionist schoolteacher] for

⁵⁶ In *The Postcolonial Critic*, Spivak argues that “the question of the object is very closely tied to the question of being *aboriginal*” (10).

planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now?

Douloti is all over India. (93)

The conclusion explicitly links Douloti's exhausted body with third-world physical space in the service of national and transnational capital: "The last sentence of the story," Spivak argues, "pushes us from the local through the national to the neocolonial globe" as the narrative ends with Douloti's body over the physical space of the map of India, and, by implication, the non-space of global capital with its diffused seat in the global North ("Woman in Difference" 128). Spivak further claims that "global feminization of superexploited labor is determined precisely by the gendering of sexual difference all over the world[,] and Europe [just like other Western powers] gains from it" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 113). By looking at Douloti, whose name coincidentally (or not) can be interpreted to mean "traffic in wealth," Spivak suggests that "the traffic in wealth [douloti] is all over the globe" (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 95). By the end of the story, the girl's metamorphosis from human being to consumable and disposable object is complete. As the news article mentioned in the introduction of this chapter reveals, perhaps the most sinister side of this exploitation lies in the fact that today there are countless Doulotis in the margins all over India who remain purposefully unseen, unimportant, and disposable, suggesting that, because of sex trafficking, poor, racialized women have become the latest species in danger of extinction.

4.3 Conclusion

Like Therese Parks's novel about sexual slavery during World War II, Mahasweta's story unmasking the prevalence of sex trafficking in India after independence compels analysis. We may wonder about the reason why Western readers have so readily embraced Mahasweta into the

literary canon, or the reaction that sex trafficking narratives like Douloti's generate in first-world audiences. Do they, coinciding with the author's intention, mobilize empathetic social change, or do they reinforce Western cultural hegemony by presenting such a bleak and hopeless portrait of reality that it merely reminds those in the global North how blessed we are and how we should continue with our charity efforts instead of addressing structural causes? Indeed, Mahasweta's portrait of gendered violence and exploitation is shocking. Yet, on a similar note, we could extrapolate what Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) or Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980) have claimed about shocking portraits: that showing atrocity does not necessarily translate into political action. Quite the contrary, it could actually desensitize the audience and depoliticize the representation. Sankaran Krishna, for his part, observes that many scholars object that "[t]he dominant mood produced by postcolonial theory is one of ironic resignation and apathy, rather than militancy and third-world solidarity" (118).

If this is the case for "Douloti," the reason we read or teach this story in a Western classroom should at least be suspected. For many well-intentioned readers, a vague sense of guilt over indirect complicity with industries that rely on third-world exploitation (unfortunately, most of them nowadays) may have a numbing effect. On another note, there are an exclusively Indian elements enabling sex trafficking in this tale: the caste system with its rigid social divisions that have kept the tribals as outsiders; religion, especially Hinduism, which assumes the inferior role of women in the family and society; a history of colonialism where women have been doubly oppressed by colonizer and colonized men--the pervasive patriarchy Spivak eloquently addresses in "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

Thus sex trafficking like Douloti's could easily present a distant reality happening mainly because of local corruption (which Mahasweta clearly shows) and unscrupulous traffickers

(which books like Kristof's *Half the Sky* would lead one to assume), with Western audiences projecting their anxieties over these orientalized foreign men. Yet, when examining the issue on a closer look, readers can understand that the global economic context plays a major role because Western economies need and profit from those weak, militarized governments servile to its profit-seeking demands.⁵⁷ When disregarding the responsibility Western capitalism has in the trafficking of third-world women (however apparently remote and removed), any analysis may lose its focus and strength, or, worse, it could turn into a justification for financial, cultural, or military domination as analyzed by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. At the same time, the complicity and liability of the local governments in power cannot be dismissed merely by blaming global finance capital: sex trafficking cannot exist without national governments enabling it in some form or another, as Mahasweta powerfully shows. As argued throughout, government officials disregard these women's plights precisely because their presence, ultimately, increases national revenues.

A trafficking victim like Douloti presents a further (postcolonial/theoretical) problem: her structural situation does not allow for her to escape. In this particular story, readers find it difficult to locate moments of significant agency--which does not mean that Douloti is a passive, "helpless animal." This girl has been raped for years, becomes sick, and dies when her body cannot resist anymore, while, one can imagine, another young Douloti will quickly replace her at the whorehouse. By this example, I am not suggesting that all third-world sex slaves are doomed to victimhood and death; in fact, sociological research shows that many women choose to become trafficked for prostitution (leaving open the question as to whether or not that is a real choice), and, in the case of those freed by NGOs intervention, several arrange their re-trafficking

⁵⁷ See Cynthia Enloe's examination of the relation between economic globalization and militarism.

voluntarily. A more fruitful way of looking at this story, then, would deconstruct the silences and contradictions that allow Douloti's exploitation to remain underground in her own society and analyze the circumstances of Douloti's constraints nationally in terms of gender and class within the current globalized economy that necessitates inequality to perpetuate itself and grow, on its most basic level, at the expense of third-world women's exploitation and invisibility. The next chapter will show how trafficked victims' invisibility is actually heightened once the women leave their home countries: unlike Douloti, whose government knows of her presence and, basically, ignores her, those women trafficked across countries will be forced to hide their mistreatment from the legal institutions, or face worse consequences.

**5 Sex Trafficking and the Legal System in Destination Countries in Amma Darko's
Beyond the Horizon and Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail***

When into the night the yellow light is roused like dust above the towns,
 Or like a mist the moon has kissed from off a pool in the midst of the downs,

Our faces flower for a little hour pale and uncertain along the street,
 Daisies that waken all mistaken white-spread in expectancy to meet

The luminous mist which the poor things wist was dawn arriving across the sky,
 When dawns is far behind the star the dust-lit town has driven so high.

All the birds are folded in a silent ball of sleep,
 All the flowers are faded from the asphalt isle in the sea,
 Only we hard-faced creatures go round and round, and keep
 The shores of this innermost ocean alive and illusory.

Wanton sparrows that twittered when morning looked in at their eyes
 And Cyprian's-pavement roses are gone, and now it is we
 Flowers of illusion who shine in our gauds, make a Paradise
 On the shores of this ceaseless ocean, gay birds of the town-dark sea.

D. H. Lawrence, "Piccadilly Circus at Night"

As if disclosing before a stubbornly incredulous audience that the emperor has no clothes, in his analysis of the current immigration situation in Europe, the Turkish Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk observes that "the poor, unemployed and undefended of Asia and Africa who are looking for new places to live and work cannot be kept out of Europe indefinitely. Higher walls, tougher visa restrictions and ships patrolling borders in increasing numbers will only postpone the day of reckoning" (Pamuk). Because of the current map of social exclusion, transnational migration of third-world populations to the global North has long ceased to be a phenomenon to be discouraged by Western governments to become instead an inevitable reality that the first world must accept and address. For millions, migration is now a matter of life or death. The truth is that

the existing unequal distribution of wealth has pushed vulnerable populations to abandon their homelands in search of survival where they can access some means of sustenance, even under dangerous exploitation.

As analyzed in the previous chapter through the case of India, decolonization, which initially presented itself as the panacea for economic and cultural growth, proved to be a utopic dream once countries were left on their own after years of mismanagement and exploitation. Coinciding with Frantz Fanon's early diagnosis, so-called emerging countries have attempted to resurrect a by now forgotten pre-colonial culture and generate competitive economies with the help of institutions supposedly created to aid in their "development" (the IMF, the WTO, the World Bank), yet it is clear that their structural adjustment plans have only impoverished vulnerable populations more, while the local elites enjoy benefits akin to the foreign ruling class during colonial times.

The decades after decolonization have witnessed the economic meltdown of former colonies because these countries have become utterly indebted and are now subjected to the demands of global finance capital, the latest (more sanitized) form of colonization. Haiti, for example, the first Latin American country to achieve independence, proves that early freedom does not translate into earlier recovery; in fact, Haiti's situation is extremely dire. In Africa, Ghana and Nigeria (the countries analyzed in this chapter) fall into a similar pattern.⁵⁸ What the former colonies regrettably share is the ghost of utter debt together with an increasing chasm between rich and poor, so that migrating to the West has now replaced the old independence dream: for many, the global North has become the Promised Land. A novel element, however, is

⁵⁸ While the situation of these countries is volatile and unstable at best, as of 2012, Ghana seems to be gradually recovering economically. Nigeria, on the other hand, at the moment is experience political and economic chaos. See Mulholland reporting for *The Guardian* and "Violence in Nigeria: The Worst Yet" in *The Economist*.

that those migrating to the West encompass an ever-increasing number of women, many of whom are being trafficked.

Western countries' response to the influx of people from those previously economically exploited societies has usually been one of xenophobia and exclusion, with immigrants from poor countries constructed as a problem. Despite the much-needed menial and underpaid work these groups tend to perform for Western economies, they are assumed to embody an economic and cultural burden, allegedly consuming more national resources than they produce, or reproducing more than the (usually white) host population. As a general rule, the solution has been to militarize borders and criminalize those who manage to cross them—the perfect recipe to keep trafficking growing. Jyoti Sanghera explains that trafficking “rests upon two major factors: the illegalization and criminalization of poor people,” while he further notes that “[p]olitical and legal responses to trafficking [. . .] are by and large repressive and punitive, harming these vulnerable populations even further” (qtd. in Kempadoo xxv).

One of the strongest merits of Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) and Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* (2006), then, lies in their honest disclosure of the obstructive way in which the legal institutions work in destination countries, rendering trafficked women's exploitation invisible because of their “illegal immigrant” status. Both works reflect the situation of third-world women trafficked for prostitution internationally, in this case from Africa to Europe, as the women here represented become victims first of their traffickers' abuse, and later of the new countries' laws that force them to hide their mistreatment. Through their characters, these authors powerfully illuminate the nuances of an extremely lucrative business that relies on trafficked women's illegality and silence.

Trafficking across countries essentially necessitates the victim's criminality to maximize its profits, while the shadowy businesses of bribes, fake documents, undercover transportation, sales and re-sales of slaves, etc., generates massive revenues for those involved. The most common way trafficking operates across national borders consists of relatives or acquaintances luring potential victims with promises of work and a better future (reportedly, some of the women know that they will be engaging in prostitution, but they have no idea that the conditions will resemble literal slavery). Once out of the origin country, recruiters remove the victims' passports and provide them with fake documents to sell them as prostitutes to local pimps. This turns the women into extremely vulnerable undocumented aliens not likely to seek help because they could end up imprisoned and deported for working in "the trade" (it is worth noting that women and girls trafficked for prostitution tend to be shunned by their communities if they manage to escape and return now "impure"; of those voluntarily trafficked, one should assume that the scant possibilities in their own village or city forced them to leave in the first place, so returning after all the pain endured is not an option; many, like Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, decide to become prostitutes once their debt has been paid up for lack of better options).

Traffickers themselves insure that victims are threatened and terrorized during the first weeks of their "training," so it is unlikely that these women would leave on their own looking for help from an NGO or a police department. The language barrier also plays into the vulnerability of these women, who frequently cannot understand enough of the local language to ask for help effectively or even to know where to look for it. After their ordeals, no one is likely to be trusted. As far as law officers are concerned, traffickers are known to bribe them, so women cannot readily determine whether a law enforcement agent works for traffickers or not (rescued victims confirm that corrupt police officers often rape them and later return them to their pimps). All in

all, the weight of the law generally falls on the female victim/prostitute, easy to catch and prosecute, thus sex slaves often endure their torturous circumstances in silence, assuming this to be a lesser (and already known) evil.

Despite NGOs' efforts in disseminating information about the exploitation of victims of sex trafficking across nations, to this day the problem has not reached a viable solution precisely because the issue is still addressed through the illegality of the migrant in destination countries—Western nations assume that to legalize victims of trafficking would imply an open door policy to immigration from poor countries, so, once again, the criminal violence endured by these women takes second place because it conflicts with national interests. Marjan Wijers explains that

[t]he overall picture is that trafficked women are considered, above all, as undesirable aliens. The fact that they may be a victim of sexual violence and exploitation is completely subordinate or even irrelevant to their immigration status in the context of the current immigration policies of European countries. In this situation it is almost impossible for migrant women to ask for protection if exploitation, violence and forced prostitution occur. (Wijers 72)

The US, for example, has implemented a program to grant visas to trafficked victims (T non-immigrant visas), but those are only offered to subjects willing to testify against traffickers. Although these visas would seem potentially helpful, their restrictions can actually turn them into a mixed-blessing, especially since the recounting of traumatic experiences has been proven to be psychologically harmful. Cathy Caruth notes in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* that “modern neurobiologists point out [that] the repetition of the traumatic experience in a flashback [for example, during trial] can itself be retraumatizing; if not life threatening, it is at

least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and it can ultimately lead to deterioration”; Caruth adds that “this would also seem to explain the high suicide rate of survivors [,] who commit suicide only *after* they have found themselves completely in safety” (63). Coinciding with Caruth’s diagnosis, Chris Abani’s work under analysis features a survivor’s suicide, so, evidently, the solution needs to be reconsidered. Some trafficked women, understandably, do not wish to re-live the whole process, while the T visa does not allow for them to work and earn a living during the trial period, forcing them instead to remain in government shelters that many victims experience as virtual prisons (and where cases of rape by the authorities have often been reported).

Darko actually established herself as a writer with *Beyond*, and, for the most part, she has published in German with some books translated into English.⁵⁹ Abani achieved international recognition before *Becoming* through his *GraceLand*, a coming-of-age tale of migration and ironic infatuation with Western culture. As with previous chapters, I will examine the representation of sex trafficking victims and their abusers, as well as analyze postcolonial authors’ purpose in crafting stories of female oppression, especially looking at emergent African writers, whose welcoming to the international publishing arena could depend on the type of stories they tell or the languages in which they narrate them. Abani accounts for a longer, more established literary career than Darko, yet what ties them together in this chapter is that both writers thought-provokingly address sex trafficking of third-world, racialized females in some of their work.

⁵⁹ To this day, Darko has published *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *Spinnweben* (1996), *The Housemaid* (1998), *Verirrtes Herz* (2000), *Faceless* (2003), and *Not without Flowers* (2006), the last two novels published in her native Ghana.

In Darko's case, her personal experience as an immigrant in Germany grants vividness to a controversial reality that many Western countries choose to ignore: the perilous status of the trafficked immigrant and how the host nation profits from it.⁶⁰ Abani, for his part, constructs a carefully researched tale of a girl trafficked to London by a relative. With near-documentary precision (in Darko's case) and evocative lyricism (in Abani's), these authors describe the process from beginning to end, highlighting the hypocrisy of a legal system that traumatizes the victims more than their trafficking already has, since, even if they try to express themselves, they are denied subjectivity because of the illegal status they have acquired in a Western country. Darko's protagonist Mara ends up claiming some agency through prostituting herself as a way out, while Abani's Abigail is saved by a "benevolent" but tyrannical system that does not understand her needs and acts for her instead. In both novels, the female subalterns cannot speak their oppression to the legal institutions, so they have to find creative ways to overcome their exploitation on their own.

5.1 Sex Trafficking in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*: "...too illegal and too black for any proper job"

In *Broadening the Horizon*, a critical anthology dedicated to Amma Darko's work, Vincent O. Odamtten notes that this Ghanaian female author "appears to be someone who emerged at the right moment in her nation's cultural history and someone with the kind of abilities and training that enabled her to recognize the need for new and different stories to be told," as the existing African narratives "were only partial in their ability to reveal the new

⁶⁰ Sheldon X. Zhang explains that "[n]umerous jobs are readily available to illegal migrants, as these jobs have been rejected by the native workforce because the pay is too low, the working conditions are too harsh, or, as in prostitution, the endeavor is itself illegal" (105).

topographies of illicit flows of people, goods and capital that made dependency theories and oppositional models of center and periphery seem obsolete” (4). M. Catherine Jonet, for her part, observes that “[i]n the case of West African fiction, women’s subject positions as ‘doubly oppressed’ did not initially figure into post-colonial engagements with literature and writing” (201). Jonet further explains that

[m]ore often than not, women were presented within a masculinist economy that positioned them as agents in the de-colonization project, and that did not critically interrogate indigenous patriarchal institutions. Areas such as domestic abuse, the trafficking in women as capital between men, domestic rape, and the exploitation of women’s bodies were not central issues in postcolonial writing, which was performed primarily by men[.] (201)

In this context, Amma Darko surfaces as a new and much-needed female voice. The author has been compared to already established Ghanaian writers such as Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo in their treatment of social, political, and cultural issues in Ghana, yet Darko offers a fresh and stimulating take in confronting and contesting patriarchal oppression both in the private and public spheres.⁶¹

Beyond the Horizon, Darko’s first novel where she deals with female sex trafficking from Africa to Europe, launched the author into relative international success. The author herself immigrated to Germany following a by now familiar global economic pattern. Louise Allen Zak explains that in the 1980s “[t]he government [. . .] instituted strict measures to comply with the

⁶¹ Darko is not the only African female writer contesting patriarchy in her novels. South African authors Sindiwe Magona and Bessie Head, for example, have crafted strong, independent African females. In Magona’s case, we find them especially in her two autobiographical works, while she has also addressed urgent issues such as virgin rapes and the AIDS epidemic in Africa in her latest play. Bessie Head, for her part, has addressed prostitution and marriage proactively in several of her stories.

International Monetary Fund's requirements for economic restructuring"; as a consequence, Ghana was left "with few employment options even for university graduates. Many Ghanaians saw the opportunity to better themselves by going to *aburokyire*, the Akan word for 'beyond the horizon', or overseas" (Odamtten 12).

That many women and children support families in Africa through prostitution in the first world is no secret. Chris Abani's compatriot Chika Unigwe, for example, in her *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), powerfully depicts the lives of trafficked women in Belgium and the perils, humiliations, and dangers they daily experience. Based on thorough research, *On Black* showcases the situation of the prostitutes once outside their home countries, as they become fully dependent on their exploiters who treat them as commodities to be used up until the maximum profit is extracted out of them—and if the women ever dare attempt to leave, they pay the price of their debt with their death. For her part, Darko has confessed in several interviews her own shock upon arrival in Europe, when she confronted the reality that poor African women there constituted a sort of third-class (behind Turks) of illegal population forced by their circumstances to perform menial domestic jobs or, like her main character, work in prostitution. Darko's keen eye and lively storytelling abilities allow her to represent this bleak reality facing many African women with remarkable precision. Indeed, the dream of the "been-to" so idealized in Africa loses all its charm in Darko's unapologetic voice.

Despite being Darko's first foray into literary writing, *Beyond the Horizon* does not lack merit. Above all, Darko seduces her audience with the uninterrupted flow of her prose and her honest, often sarcastic, depiction of the situation of poor African immigrants in Europe. In this work, Darko traces the life of Mara, a naive village girl married by her unloving father to Akobi, an ambitious man from her village. This arranged liaison is predictably doomed to fail, as we

learn early that Akobi has been in love with a woman (Comfort) from Accra. Akobi takes Mara to live with him in Accra and, after a couple of years of an abusive marriage that includes marital rape, he leaves for Germany. Unknown to Mara, Akobi has devised a plan to win Comfort: travelling to Germany will grant him the coveted status of a “been-to,” while he expects to make enough money to support his lover’s expensive tastes. The means to finance Akobi’s dreams will be Mara (who will provide the money) and his German wife Gitte (who will provide the legal status). Once there, Akobi arranges for Mara to join him in Germany for a supposed future together. The extremely “green” Mara accedes, and thus her trafficking begins.

When compared with data provided by sociological research, Darko’s description of Mara’s traffic from origin to destination country looks painfully realistic. For the purpose of this analysis, it is worth looking at the plot in detail because of its similarities with an actual trafficking scheme. The woman is escorted by an African agent hired by her husband who arranges the necessary (and very expensive) bribes, provides Mara with fake papers, and removes her passport once in Europe, substituting it with a fake one that contains another African woman’s picture. To assuage Mara’s fears, the agent explains that this tactic will pose no problem to her: “In German people’s eyes [. . .] we niggers look all the same. Black faces, kinky hair, thick lips. We don’t fight with them about it. We use it to our benefit” (Darko 59). At the airport in East Berlin, Mara comes under the tutelage of a second African man (Osey) who takes her to his house where Mara meets his wife. Here Mara encounters the future awaiting her: readers learn that Osey’s wife (Vivian) has been forced to prostitute herself and pretend to be Osey’s sister because the man has married a German woman to become a legal resident. Mara later finds out that her husband Akobi, like Osey, is now married to a German woman (Gitte) to insure his legal stay in Germany, so Mara has to live with Akobi and his unsuspecting German

wife pretending to be his sister. To pay for her expenses while in their house, Akobi finds Mara a job as a maid for a white family, but she soon ends up unemployed because the German family doesn't want any problems with the government. They hastily let her go, explaining that their neighbors "were confronted yesterday by the Labour Office detectives and have been charged with employing an illegal immigrant" (108).

With Mara jobless and not producing any income, Akobi put his plan to prostitute his wife into effect earlier than he intended. He takes Mara to a "party" where he drugs her and videotapes her having sex with (according to Mara's hazy memory) probably twenty men in a pre-arranged orgy. To Mara's horror, Akobi then threatens to send that video to her family unless she cooperates. Mara finds herself without any options other than prostitution, as Osey warns her: ". . . Mara, Mara, oh Mara, even if you don't want to, you will still have to. For an illegal nigger woman like you, there is no other job in Germany, Mara. If you don't get a housemaid job then there's only this. You understand? Because you are too illegal and too black for any proper job, you get it?" (114).

In this way, without legal documents or money, not speaking the native language, and having been already "broken into," Mara is sold to a pimp who regularly deposits Mara's earnings into Akobi's bank account. Once Mara starts her life of prostitution, she learns that many African women in Germany find themselves in her appalling situation. Her new friend Kaye, for example, explains to Mara that she has "gone through a similar ordeal years ago" when her then-boyfriend decided to traffic her from Africa because he "[s]aw how other men were making fast money with their girlfriends" (117). Kaye's boyfriend trafficked her to Frankfurt, "[t]hen he coerced her into prostitution, pocketed every mark she made and kept her in the trade by blackmailing her with pictures he had clandestinely taken of her in action with different men"

(117). Mara's own ordeal continues for some time, until, after suffering the harsh reality of sexual slavery long enough, Mara becomes a more cynical, calculating woman finally capable of action: "Why couldn't I take control of my own life, since after all, I was virtually husbandless and, anyway, what did my husband care about a woman's virtue? [. . .] The body being used and misused belongs to me. [. . .] If I couldn't help myself out of my situation then why not turn it to my advantage?" (118-9). She eventually manages to escape with Kaye's help, not without first avenging herself on Akobi. Through a rather surprising spying scheme (perhaps Darko's attempt to provide her audience with an unforgiving heroine), Mara exposes Akobi's fraudulent marriage and illegal status, which gets him immediately imprisoned. As for her, she cannot go back home after so many years of humiliation, so she decides to stay, now a drug addict, working as a prostitute in Munich and financing her family back home with the money she now earns.

Clearly, in this world Darko depicts, women are commodities to be traded, used, and discarded by men. The author targets a culture where marriage and prostitution intertwine as one and the same, with women becoming exchange currency from which only men enjoy the profits. Here, those who "traffic" Mara are African and European men who use her to obtain an economic benefit because of a patriarchal hegemony that regards women as objects of consumption under men's patronage. Mara initially depends completely on her father; she later becomes Akobi's appendix, and finally her pimp's property. Mara's father thus sells his daughter to an unworthy man for "two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin," yet Mara knows all too well that her father would have given her away "even for one goat" (3, 7). Her husband Akobi sells her to her first pimp (Pompey) and keeps all of her income to finance his future escapade with his African lover. Despite her being the one earning the money, Mara has no voice in the arrangement between her

husband and the pimp, who “would deduct his percentage and deposit the rest in Akobi’s private account” (118). Ironically, she achieves more freedom with her last white pimp (Oves), the one she voluntarily chooses at the end of the novel, because at least then she manages to keep some of her income for herself and support her family back home. But Mara’s image of Oves does not bring much comfort, either: a pimp “not as tolerant as Pompey and Kaye” who keeps her hooked on cocaine to maximize her income (139). As Mara admits, “[h]e is my lord, my master, my pimp. And like the other women on my left and right [prostitutes in the brothel], I am his pawn, his slave and his property” (3).

None of these men evoke any sympathy from readers. In the case of the Africans (Akobi and Osey), despite sharing the same ethnicity, their treatment of Mara does not significantly differ from that of her white clients in Germany—for different reasons, all these men exploit her, but at least her sadistic clients pay her for the tortures she endures. In “Male-bashing and Narrative Subjectivity in Amma Darko’s First Three Novels,” Mawuli Adjei’s points out that Darko represents African men following the pattern of men as “enemy” archetypes (48), but in an interview Darko retorts that the chosen subject matter in *Beyond* (sex trafficking) leaves her with little room for likable men (Bouillion). Darko also points out that her main male character (Akobi) shows a capacity to love his African lover—the sole motivation to traffic his wife and gather easy money fast (Adjei 48). Interestingly, the African men who find themselves in Germany also become pariahs in that society, victims of the same racism and discrimination Mara suffers, but they still manage to play the system to their advantage because women remain below their status (in Darko’s novel, men deceive and lure white women to marry them and

become legal citizens, while they finance their expenses through prostituting their African wives and girlfriends). Even there, African men are on top.⁶²

Looking at Mara's portrayal, some critics have pointed out that this village woman seems too naïve. True, Mara's tolerance exceeds average standards, but her situation is not uncommon. Men in her life have only taken from her, so she does not know anything different. Mara has endured intolerable violations from her husband, yet for a while she appears resigned, even content. Since she has no education, her possibilities of earning money are limited to the permission and loans of the men to whom she submits. Her own culture, through her mother's words of wisdom, has taught her that "a wife was there for one thing, and that was to ensure [her husband's] well-being, which included his pleasure" (Darko 13). In Mara's mind, Akobi's brutality towards her is "natural," as she remembers that "[i]nitially, many things that happened in [her] marriage appeared to [her] to be matter-of-course things that happened in all marriages and to all the wives" (12). Mara confesses: "I still regarded my suffering as part of being a wife, and endured it just like I would menstrual pain" (13).

Yet the descriptions of Akobi's treatment of Mara can only shock: one night Mara is awoken by "a painful kick in [her] ribs"; another day she looks at her husband in terror as he "clenched his knuckles ready to knock pain into [her] forehead" (11, 21). Typically, sex between Mara and her husband, in her own account, would go as follows: "Wordlessly, he stripped off my clothes, stripped off his trousers, turned my back to him and entered me. Then he ordered me off the mattress to go and lay out my mat because he wanted to sleep alone"; on other occasions, while the position does not change, Mara refers more specifically to the "sharp pain of Akobi's entry in [her]," or how "brutal and over-fast" he is with her (22, 84). Thus Mara is regularly

⁶² See Frías.

insulted, punched, kicked, hit, slapped, raped, and forced to sleep on the floor. Her first pregnancy only enrages her husband more, so the beatings intensify. By offering her readers an outrageous description of marriage--where the representations of marital sex throughout resemble plain cases of domestic rape and culminate in a husband trafficking his wife for prostitution--Darko brings attention to the cultural silences that allow violence against women to remain in the private domestic sphere in her native Ghana.

But even when Mara leaves her “primitive” land to start a life in “civilized” Europe, she is forced to conceal the sexual abuse/torture she continues to endure at the hands of unknown men because the stigma associated with prostitution does not guarantee that her abusers will be prosecuted and punished; worse, she has become an illegal (and therefore criminal) resident, so by asking for help to the state, she risks jail time and subsequent deportation herself. Mara then endures the rapes during her marriage as her fate as a wife, while she assumes her European customers’ exploitation as her destiny as a prostitute. Analyzing the contradictions of the legal discourse on rape, Anne McClintock observes that “[u]ntil very recently, two categories of women have been deemed unrapeable by law: wives and prostitutes” (“Screwing the System” 77). Darko paints an unsettling portrait of Mara’s predicament powerfully challenging such patriarchal assumptions. As Jonet argues, “[t]he revelation that West African women are exploited (sexually and otherwise) by European and African heteropatriarchy is the open secret that Darko names, which is no secret at all” (202). Darko’s mordant critique, then, rocks the surface and disturbs established orders, while she problematizes the “lawful” (citizenship) and the “natural” (marriage).

Indeed, here lies one of the novel’s strongest edges, in bringing to the surface a reality that has remained hypocritically hidden out of convenience. Pervasive assumptions regarding

women as men's property and prostitution as a necessary evil mix with European racism and xenophobia in a schizophrenic cocktail: in *Beyond*, African men rape and sell their African wives into prostitution, but seduce and entice German women into marriage, while German men demand and consume African sex slaves in the shadows of the brothels, but openly prosecute and deport them for their illegal status and activities in the sanctity of the law courts. To maintain a façade of stability, the German legal system expels these commodified African women that, ironically, German men desire and purchase. In her analysis of gender, Judith Butler explains how the coherence of the subject is consolidated through "Othering": "As Iris Young has suggested in her use of Kristeva to understand sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation" (108). "Young's appropriation of Kristeva," Butler continues,

shows how the operation of repulsion can consolidate "identities" founded on the instituting of the "Other" or a set of Others through exclusion and domination.

What constitutes though division the "inner" and "outer" worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control. The boundary between the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit. (108)

The women in this novel, however, manage to devise plans to escape and gain some (limited) control of their lives playing with the same legal system that treats them as unwanted excrement: Vivian leaves Osey to marry a drug addict American GI and thus obtains an American passport

that enables her to move legally to the US, while Mara pays a German drug addict for a fake marriage and gets a five-year resident visa that allows her to move freely and find work at a brothel of her choice.

Like the authors analyzed in the previous chapters, without resorting to much description of the actual violence, when portraying Mara's German clients raping her, Darko oscillates between tropes of pain, torture, and humiliation from Mara's point of view, pushing readers out of their comfort zone while leading them to empathize with her female protagonist. The novel begins with Mara facing an oval mirror "staring painfully at [. . .] what is left of what once used to be [her] image," recounting her experiences up to then. She is in tears, feeling cold, empty, isolated. Her body has been mutilated, "used and abused by strange men" (Darko 1). The catalogue she offers when she describes her physical condition after years of sexual slavery speaks directly of the men who have ravaged her at the brothels. She now looks like a mockery of the village woman she once was, with "sore cracked lips" covered in thick red lipstick and "hideous traces of bites and scratches all over [her] neck [. . .] that extend even far beyond the back of [her] ears"; blankly, Mara contemplates the "several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of [her] best payers, [her] best spenders. And even back down [her] spine too run a couple more—horrendous ones" (2). One of her customers broke her little finger in a sadomasochistic game, leaving her with an indelible reminder of the torture and the torturer:

[my little finger is] bent. Its bone's been displaced and it looks weird. I see it all the time and I loathe it, but not the money that came with it. The injury was done to me by one of my best spenders, a giant of a man but who always, when he comes to me, cries like a baby in my arms, telling me about his dictator wife whom he loves but who treats him so bad she makes him lick her feet at night.

Then filled with loathing and rage or revenge for this wife he'd love to kill, but lacking the guts to even pull her hair, he imagines me to be her, orders me to shout I am her and *does horrible things to me like I never saw a man ever do to a woman before in the bushes I hail from*. But I bear it because it is part of my job. [. . .] And even when he puts me in pain and spits upon me and calls me a nigger fool I still offer him my crimson smile and pretend he's just called me a princess [my emphasis]. (2-3)

Unable to verbalize the sexual violence directly, Mara only mentions “horrible things,” yet by describing the litany of injuries her body has endured, readers understand that her clients have consistently brutalized her. Hence the presence of those men paying for sex with Mara (the more affluent demand side that keeps the trafficking engine going) materializes in the narrative through what remains of her body, “this bit of garbage that once used to be [her]” (3). Like Therese Park or Mahasweta Devi, Darko does not pry into the minds of those clients torturing Mara. Her “consumers” are for the most part elided from the text, which reflects the actual dynamics of the sex trafficking discourse, where the media mainly targets abhorrent pimps and innocent victims, but leaves the demand side out of the picture as a nameless figure only useful for NGO statistics and funding.

In *Beyond*, we only witness what men do to Mara through the scars inscribed in the texture of her black skin. At the same time, from Mara's white clients calling her a “nigger,” readers see that Mara's race plays a role in her exploitation, with the woman offering them an eroticized and exoticized object of desire. As Kempadoo explains, “images of the ‘exotic’ are entwined with ideologies of racial and ethnic difference: the ‘prostitute’ is defined as ‘other’ in comparison to the racial or ethnic origin of the client”—who separates between white women, fit

for marriage and motherhood, and black women, left for “uninhibited and unrestricted sexual intercourse” (10). Research shows that female black bodies remain in high demand within the sex industry, as white clients often prefer to unleash their repressed fantasies of sex with an orientalized other, altogether desired, feared, and despised. Interestingly, despite this demand for black bodies, “Third World women [. . .] are positioned second to white women. White sex workers invariably work in safer, higher paid and more comfortable environments[, while] Black women are still conspicuously overrepresented in the poorest and most dangerous sectors of the trade” (11). Kempadoo further contends that

[t]o some scholars, racial/ethnic structuring visible in the global sex industry highly resembles the exoticist movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which “labelling the anthropomorphical Other as exotic legitimated treating the people of the ‘third world’ as fit to be despised—destroyed even . . . while concurrently also constituting them as projections of western fantasies” (Rousseau and Porter 1990:7). (10)

The power men exercise over Mara is slightly different, then. German men consume Mara because she is black and poor. African men consume Mara because she is a woman.

Along these lines, readers notice that while Akobi’s sexual abuse of Mara during their marriage is described in straightforward language, the violent sexual scenes where Mara is raped by her clients in Germany seem to escape the text, perhaps reflecting the difference between what Mara perceives as “natural” inside a marriage (and she can thus verbalize) from the traumatic transgression (with which she cannot cope). Thus Mara’s actual victimization during her life as a prostitute is often elusively suggested rather than openly depicted. Suggesting the difficulty of symbolizing rape aesthetically and empathetically, readers note that Mara’s first

rape scene during the orgy that initiates her life as sex slave is practically erased from the character's consciousness since she has been drugged by her husband. During her initial fragmentary account, Mara refuses to actually name what is happening, resorting instead to circumlocutions:

[. . .] suddenly the room was filled with people, all men, and they were talking and laughing and drinking. And they were completely naked! There must have been at least ten men for what I saw were at least twenty images.

Then they were all around me, many hairy bodies, and they were stripping me, fondling me, playing with my body, pushing my legs apart, wide apart. *As for the rest of the story, I hope that the gods of Naka didn't witness it* [my emphasis].

(Darko 111)

Mara feels her genitals ache the following morning, but she seems unaware or forgetful of what has taken place during the party. Incapable of dealing with the sexual aggression endured, she represses the trauma.

When that rape is finally addressed in the narrative, Darko resorts to describing the scene through Mara watching everything on a video tape, which distances Mara from her rape once again as she becomes now a shocked spectator of the savagery. Not coincidentally, the authors analyzed in previous chapters resort to similar devices: Douloti and Soon-ah mentally and emotionally detach from their rapes and "watch" the violence from outside their bodies. Darko, for her part, conveys the sexual violence Mara suffered indirectly, mediated first through drugs and then a videotape. Even at the end of the novel, when readers perceive Mara as a now-seasoned prostitute resigned to her fate, the character still avoids talking directly about the sexual acts she must daily perform; instead she confesses to having "accompanied [many men] on sinful

rides through the back doors of heaven and returned with them back to earth,” as if the metaphor would push her abject reality further away from her (131). As a stylistic choice, Darko emphasizes the violence Mara undergoes from the woman’s point of view, without showcasing her protagonist as a star in a pornographic novel for readers to project their scopophilic gaze upon her. Once inside the brothels, what we are allowed to “see” are scars, bite marks, and a broken finger, not erotic sex.

In what begins to look like a familiar pattern in these stories addressing forced prostitution, even though the action of her novel revolves around sex trafficking, Darko does not devote significant space to sexually explicit scenes. Like the authors previously analyzed, Darko targets instead the structural constraints on her female character: the perils of being an “illegal” migrant in a Western country, depending entirely on abusive men. The author juxtaposes the dream of Europe, which Mara has imagined as “Heaven itself[,]” with the inferno she encounters once she finds herself trapped in a Western country, only capable of surviving through prostitution (34). As an authoritative source who has lived there, and therefore can tell the tale, Darko shows that, despite the glamorous image of Europe Africans have constructed, once there illegal Africans face xenophobia, racism, and exclusion.⁶³ In this way, Mara’s African culture also plays a role in her exploitation since the unreal expectations of success in Europe force migrant Africans to tolerate humiliation and abuse for the sake of not disappointing those left at home—and often continue the uninterrupted supply of money and goods for relatives in Africa. In the novel both men and women feel the pressure to succeed in Germany at any prize, often enduring prejudice and exploitation, but coinciding with the works previously analyzed,

⁶³ On several interviews, Darko clarifies that Mara does not represent herself or her experience in Germany, but that of other African women she met there, who were forced to prostitute themselves by husbands or boyfriends. Much of the material for *Beyond* then comes from the stories Darko heard from their first-hand accounts.

trafficked women pay a double price, becoming the “last instance” or weakest link in the chain of oppression, since once outside their native lands, they even lose the hope of some official protection (however minimal) against abuse (Spivak, “Woman in Difference” 82). Instead, they remain in the control of husbands, boyfriends, or pimps who actually benefit from the women’s illegal status and the foreign country’s xenophobia.

Throughout, Darko gives readers a sarcastic glimpse of the stereotypes prevalent in Germany, which reinforce the imperative to prevent poor Africans from entering Europe by legal means. As Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* (1994), these stereotypes must be “anxiously repeated” in order to assure their permanence and maintain (white) power structures unchallenged (66). At the port of entry, Mara faces prejudice for the first time:

The official who checked me just glanced at my face and at the picture [of another African woman], scurried through the passport and, rather than scrutinizing [her fake passport] to see the minute differences seemed more concerned to know why I had married a ‘Deustcher’ and not an ‘Afrikaner’ like myself, and whether I was intending to continue living in this their fatherland after my five years expired, and wouldn’t it be better for me to return back to Africa? Germany was too cold or how warm I felt when in truth his only concern was: ‘Ach du meine Gute!’ Yet another primitive African face come to pollute the oh-so-pure German air and stuff it with probably yet more unwanted brown babies! (Darko 60)

A by-product of their earlier colonization, Darko represents Africans having (partly) internalized a sense of the inferiority of their culture and the primitiveness of their superstitions, which plays a part in their exploitation in Europe; however, Darko does not show a complete assimilation of their “inferiority” as explained by Fanon or Ngugi because, despite imaging

Europe as the panacea, in this novel Africans in Germany use the racist stereotypes to their advantage (these stereotypes, in fact, enable Mara's trafficking and her later fraudulent marriage visa since "all black people look the same").⁶⁴ As for Mara, before travelling to Germany she changes her style completely: "I no longer wore African cloth, neither new nor old. No! I wore dresses, European dresses" (48). The irony, of course, is that her attempt at European mimicry is not intended for the European's acceptance, but for her African husband's (who also wants to assimilate a European status but to impress his African lover Comfort). If any, Akobi's materialistic lover Comfort would be the one who could resemble most closely Fanon's Manichean model, where Europeans embody the perfection Africans lack and therefore wish to possess or imitate. Mara and Akobi, on the other hand, have chosen other Africans as objects of desire: Mara only wants to please her African husband, while Akobi desires to possess his African lover. Comfort thus presents an interesting case because Darko shows her as drifting to from one lover to the next, only interested in their economic and social status while looking down on anyone coming from the "bushes." Indeed, the only reason Akobi wants to Europeanize himself (and thus traffic Mara) is to lure Comfort; he even changes his name to the more Westernized "Coby" to facilitate his plans. As for Mara's Westernized clothes, those register neither in Akobi's nor in German people's eyes, to whom Mara looks like a pitiable hybrid, a "monkey in jeans" who will only be good enough for cheap sex (70).

As an illegal immigrant in Europe, Mara quickly finds out that "life for us black people, from Africa especially, is very very hard" when Osey reveals to her that "[i]n the eyes of the

⁶⁴ In "Transnational, Transcultural Feminisms? Amma Darko's Response in *Beyond the Horizon*," Mary Ellen Higgins argues that in fact Darko "updates" Fanon's analysis because she shows African men and women who wish to seduce people of their same race (Akobi wants his African lover Comfort, and Vivian wants her African husband Osey) (316-7). In Darko's novel, white people are only used by Africans to obtain residence papers, whereas Africans remain objects of desire.

people here, we are several shades too black for their land. And many, not all, but many, don't like us, because for them we are wild things that belong in the jungle" (76). Osey continues, "[o]ne or two monkeys about the civilised man's house are acceptable, but when the monkeys send for their long line of relatives and friends, the 'civilised' house owner begins to react. He is prepared to tolerate one or two monkeys[, but then] the 'civilised' man shows his real face[,] almost never a pleasant face" (76). Mara hence learns that "German people, or at least those who represent them, don't want many of us here in their country, so they do all they can to make things very difficult for us, so that we will feel humiliated and think of returning to our homeland as a palatable alternative" (76-7).

But for a former sex slave like Mara, returning has lost its allurement. Mara even imagines her mother looking at her body now, and the embarrassment she would feel because "[o]nce a prostitute, always a prostitute" (119). The abuse she has received from her husband and her clients does not offer Mara anything to look forward to in Ghana, while her current situation may not look like "a wholly undesirable life" since for the first time she has gained some control over her body and her finances (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29). She has entered the lucrative porn industry, as she is now "to be seen in a couple of more sex videos" and "[s]tage shows"; she confesses that she has "plunged into [her] profession down to the marrow of [her] bones," so much that she can "no longer remember or imagine what being a non-whore is" (139, 31, 39). Darko thus provides readers with a quasi-heroine who, in spite of all her suffering, manages to utilize German immigration laws to her advantage and punish evildoers (through an anonymous letter, she gets Akobi imprisoned in Germany and his lover Comfort deported), support her family in Africa, and control her destiny by moving to a different city to place herself in the

hands of a new, less sympathetic, pimp. All in all, readers can see that Mara does achieve some agency in the end since she is the one choosing her destiny.⁶⁵

Yet Mara's last choice remains open to interpretation since we know that she has become a drug addict dependent on cocaine (the new pimp "gives us 'snow' to sniff, to make us high"), with her body and soul mutilated after years of exploitation (139). We assume that she cannot attempt lawful employment because her fake residence permission could give her away. The pervasive racism of the country, on the other hand, leaves Mara with scant job opportunities outside the sex industry. As for her maltreatment, she must accept it as a consequence of her status since she is not registered as a legal prostitute and therefore cannot ask for protection against violence or enjoy any social benefits.⁶⁶ And while it is true that "agency and victimhood are not mutually exclusive[, and that] victims are also agents who can change their lives and affect other lives in radical ways," this novel's end shows that, regardless of how hard she tries to succeed, Mara has become a battered drug addict with a fraudulent document to stay in Germany, while the money she earns comes from men who treat her as a "monkey" prostitute with an impending expiration date--if her illegality ever comes to light (Novak 46).

⁶⁵ For an analysis on the situation of African women who get control of their sexuality and finances working as prostitutes in Europe see Maria Frias's "Women on Top: Prostitution and Pornography in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*."

⁶⁶ Prostitution is legal in Germany. Prostitutes pay taxes, but they have access to benefits like health care or protection in case of violence, for example. We can assume that Mara does not enjoy legal protection or health benefits since she must remain underground.

5.2 Sex Trafficking in Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*: "Imagine how lucky those children are!"

A former political prisoner in Nigeria now exiled in the United States, Chris Abani has received numerous accolades for his trajectory as a writer.⁶⁷ In the tradition of towering figures in Nigerian literature like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ben Okri--yet with a distinct lyrical style--Abani has carved his own path and has surfaced as a so-called "third generation" voice, addressing through his characters' background stories the social and political problems facing his home country after independence (Novak 33).⁶⁸ Since his youth, Abani has positioned himself as a committed writer not afraid to reveal his political and social concerns, and, like the Kenyan Ngugi, he has often denounced the abuses and corruption of his government.

Both Abani and Darko have achieved more fame internationally than in their home countries. Abani gained especial recognition with his *GraceLand* (2004), where the author touches upon the consequences of neocolonialism in Nigeria through the eyes of an adolescent boy, trying to show, in the author's own words, "an epic representation of a culture [. . .] through a very intimate portrait" (Ellis 22). Among other relevant social issues, in *GraceLand*, the young Elvis finds out about the "rampant" global business of organ trafficking in Nigeria (here, with the complicity of the Nigerian military), explicitly targeting the connivance of legitimate local institutions and others in the developed world importing the latest kind of African natural resources (Kattanek 429).

⁶⁷ Throughout his career, Abani has won several awards for his literary production; among them, we can list the Lannan Literary Fellowship in Poetry in 2003, a Hellman/Hammet Grant in 2003, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in Fiction.

⁶⁸ During his youth, Abani was involved in politics in Nigeria, which resulted in his incarceration on three different occasions (in 1985, 1987, and 1990) for allegedly inspiring left-wing, subversive activity towards the Nigerian government through his writing. Like Elvis, his main character in *GraceLand* (2004), Abani experienced torture during his time in jail. Abani's book of poetry *Kalakuta Republic* (2001) deals more specifically with his imprisonment and torture.

In *Becoming Abigail*, Abani also employs a child/adolescent main protagonist, but this time he faces the creative challenge of speaking from the perspective of a young female to address the difficult subjects of child abuse and sex trafficking. Abani's style in this novella captures the disturbed mind of a sexually abused and emotionally numbed little girl, unsettling throughout readers' notions of right and wrong. The author fuses prose with poetry in "a constant dialogue" between the two genres to achieve a narration that speaks with "precision of language and beauty of imagery," while still confronting audiences with the ethical imperative of acknowledging the presence of trafficked children in the West (23). Abani's lyricism in *Becoming* thus manages to transport readers directly into the child's psychological subjectivity, blurring clear-cut assumptions on victims and victimizers. Even though the topic of sex trafficking could easily lead a writer to represent a child as a helpless victim, Abani crafts his young protagonist as an empowered girl who, like her biblical namesake, shows intelligence and strength: in sharp contrast to Darko's younger Mara, Abigail is certainly not "green." Yet both female characters undergo similar circumstances when it comes to their trafficking, while ironically their families in Africa assume that these girls have been touched by the magic wand of civilization and therefore propel them to leave their native homelands.

For the purpose of this analysis, both *Beyond* and *Becoming* enrich our understanding of trafficked victim's predicament because the authors reflect upon the status of the trafficked illegal immigrant in Europe, one from the perspective of a woman (Darko), the other a child (Abani). In this respect, if Abani's Abigail was older and stayed in prostitution (a likely path in her situation), she would have probably followed Mara's steps: she would be considered an illegal prostitute, so she would have had to endure the harshest exploitation in silence. But in Abani's novel, the fact that Abigail is an underage victim of sex trafficking does not commit her

to a detention center like older trafficked prostitutes, but to the care of a male social worker—for Abigail, her first real love, for the British legal system, her latest sexual predator.

Abani's focus also differs from Darko's in that the Ghanaian author provides a detailed account of Mara's traffic in the first person and from her point of view. Darko showcases how German laws enable Mara's exploitation and force her to hide. Instead, Abani resorts to free indirect discourse and a third-person omniscient narrator who immerses readers in Abigail's traumatized mind. The Nigerian author focuses on the child's earlier development in Africa and the legal system's procedures in England once the trafficked victim is rescued. Unlike Darko, then, Abani does not describe the trafficking process in detail, but rather Abigail's life of abuse in Nigeria and, once in England, the effects of government agencies' interventions on a young girl's already damaged psyche.⁶⁹

In *Becoming*, the narration alternates between Abigail's haunted reflections on "Now" (in London) and "Then" (for the most part in Nigeria, but as the story progresses, in London). Abani traces the traumatic experiences of a young Nigerian child, whose mother (also named Abigail) dies giving birth to her, leaving her alone with an emotionally numb father who is incapable of dealing with his grief, much less taking care of his daughter. Haunted by her mother's ghost and completely ignored by her father—who remains unaware of the sexual abuse she undergoes at the hands of older relatives--Abigail begins to self-mutilate, cutting herself with knives. Instead of listening to his own child's cries for help, her father at times seems more worried about the family dog not interested in the doghouse he has built. Even a psychiatrist disregards her

⁶⁹ In this respect, England has been notorious for its "imprisonment" of children of illegal immigrant parents awaiting deportation. The lasting psychological damage that such measures cause innocent youngsters (i.e. post traumatic stress disorder) have been proven and debated in England's High court, which has pressured the current coalition government into action. As an attempt to solve the problem, Nick Clegg, England's Deputy Prime Minister since the 2010 general elections, has recently promised an end to the detention policy and more humanitarian treatment for illegal children, but, arguably, ingrained racist attitudes towards immigrants will have to transform before any significant change occurs.

evidently traumatized self and dismisses her with aspirins for children. Readers also learn that her cousin Mary's husband (Peter) has been living in London and frequently returns to Nigeria to entice "lucky" children with promises of a better future in England. When Peter offers to take Abigail with him to London, her father accedes, hoping for better prospects for his daughter: "London will give you a higher standard of education and living," he imagines (Abani 66). Intelligent and perceptive, Abigail smells the danger and wonders what has happened to all the other children who immigrated to London with Peter, yet her father's suicide days later seals her fate. In this way, much like Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, Abigail is trafficked to Europe to become a sex slave. Once in London, Abigail confirms her earlier suspicions that Peter's business is *non sancto*: Peter brings a "client" one night who attempts to rape her, but because of Abigail's fierce reaction when defending herself, Peter chains her to a doghouse (echoing the one her father built in Nigeria for their dog). Here, the child receives a shockingly inhuman treatment, but with her cousin Mary's help, Abigail finally manages to escape after biting Peter's penis off during one of her daily rapes. She is found by the police and placed under the legal care of Derek, a much older social worker with whom the child starts a passionate love affair that brings their abrupt downfall.

Abigail, the child, is the center of Abani's novella. Her conscious wanderings dominate the action from beginning to end, while other characters (for the most part male) stand as a backdrop to her truncated development. Her father fails to protect her in every sense and actually encourages her migration to Europe with her exploiter. Peter, Abigail's trafficker, disturbs readers from the beginning, as we learn that he sexually abused the girl when she was ten. Derek, the social worker "helping" her after her rescue, becomes another source of sexual exploitation (although the author is careful to avoid any explicit manipulation at Derek's hands and presents

Abigail as aware and choosing this relationship). Abigail's representation is thus provocative. She is a victim of men who ignore or exploit her, but, at the same time, the author depicts her as strong and in control of her decisions, especially when it comes to her sexuality. The irony, of course, is that by the end of the novella she is only fourteen.

Her harrowing evolution from child into adolescent occupies, for the most part, the "Then" part of the story. Abigail is trying to "become" her own self, independent of her mother's residual emotional weight. The narrator describes Abigail's sexual explorations, prematurely and intrusively initiated at only ten years old, impassively: "Peter had cornered her in the bathroom. She didn't shrink away like other girls her age might have at being surprised in the bathroom with her underwear halfway down[.] Surprised at her fearlessness he kissed her, his finger exploring her" (61). Earlier in the story, we learn that "[s]he had been ten when her first, fifteen-year-old cousin Edwin, swapped her cherry for a bag of sweets" (28). From Abigail's perspective in the "Now" sections, we see that "[n]one of the men who had taken her in her short lifetime had seen her"—for the most part, we don't know who these men are, when they have "taken" her, or whether that has occurred with her consent (26).

Consistent with the way many children often internalize sexual abuse—assuming themselves agents rather than victims--the narration disquiets readers because it shows an ambivalent reaction to sexual victimization on the part of the child. At times, Abigail seems to regret that men didn't stop long enough to contemplate her in all her adolescent beauty; in one of the "Then" sections, the narrator paints a panoramic description of the child's body (not seen in any of the narratives by female authors analyzed so far), highlighting her sensuality from the perspective of an arguably "male gaze" (Mulvey 1175):

None of them noticed the gentle shadow her breasts cast on her stomach as she reached on tiptoe for the relief of a stretch. Never explored the dip in her lower back where perspiration collected like gentle dew. They never weighed the heft of her breasts the way she did, had, from the moment of her first bump. [. . .] This wasn't an erotic exercise, though it became that, inevitably. At first it was a curiosity, a genuine wonder at the burgeoning of a self, a self that was still Abigail, yet still her. With the tip of a wax crayon she would write "me," over and over on the brown rise of them. [. . .] But not the men in her life; they hadn't really stopped long enough. She was a foreign country to them. One they wanted to pass through as quickly as possible. (Abani 26-7)

Like Mahasweta Devi's land metaphor in "Douloti," Abani explicitly refers to the child's body as a landscape where men dig and take.⁷⁰ In this way, the author sprinkles the narrative with conquistadorial references, entwining colonialism with rape: Abigail's "light complexion," in fact, "was a throwback from the time a Portuguese sailor had mistaken her great-grandmother's cries" (26). Sex trafficking thus brings attention to the continuity of these colonial rapes, now without the "hassle" of having to leave the comfort of Europe. By linking the colonial landscape with the female body, Abani resorts to familiar trope. In "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: *The Field of Life and Death* Revisited," Lydia Liu brings attention to the problem of national identity and how women have conventionally served as a metaphor for the

⁷⁰ I am not suggesting that Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful" or Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* treat their female characters as nationalistic fetishes. While Mahasweta's writing style has little in common with Abani's, both authors bring attention to the predicament of the trafficked woman's subjectivity above all, while they grant their characters dignity and strength. Douloti's circumstances differ considerably from Abigail's (for example, while Abigail reads and enjoys Chinese poetry in translation—and thus we infer she is educated—Douloti is illiterate and carries her father's bond debt, which makes her situation far more constrained). Coincidentally, both girls are trafficked at age fourteen.

colonized nation violated by the colonizer.⁷¹ The fairness of such comparison, however, remains open to question given the links between chauvinism and nationalism and the traditional use of women to embody the purity of the nation. Liu observes that “the female body is ultimately displaced by nationalism, whose discourse denies the specificity of female experience by giving larger symbolic meaning to the signifier of rape” (44). To utilize raped women as an emblem of colonized nationhood then diminishes the relevance of the traumatic event endured by the woman for a “higher” communal purpose. In Abani’s case, readers perceive a clear anti-colonial subtext (especially when he refers to racist attitudes in England), yet his focus throughout remains on Abigail’s mental and physical deterioration in themselves rather than showing an allegory of his nation.

Once in London, for example, Peter takes Abigail shopping to buy her make-up and revealing clothes, which makes the shop assistants suspiciously uncomfortable but not provoked enough to react or attempt to protect the girl (or hesitant to take action for fear of being perceived as racist). After all, Peter and Abigail are black in a predominantly white society where prejudice is very prevalent. Abigail still remembers her father’s “funny stories” about the days he visited London with his wife and found it almost impossible to rent a place to stay—the “*No Black. No Irish. No dogs*” landlords’ signs left them with few options (55-6). Reminiscent of Caryl Phillips’s novels, Abani touches upon English xenophobia and the implication that Africans encompass an underclass that should be prevented from entering the country by strict legal means. Abigail “realized pretty quickly, from the way she was treated at the shops [. . .], that the

⁷¹ In “Women on Top: Prostitution and Pornography in Amma Darko’s *Beyond the Horizon*,” Maria Frías notes that “[m]ale African writers such as Armah, Farah, and Soyinka have associated the exploited African women’s bodies with the Mother Africa trope. These authors have equated African women’s bodies with colonial and postcolonial corruption, and have tended to resolve the stories with unhappy endings” (8).

English could forgive you anything except a foreign accent” (69). But against Frederic Jameson’s contested assertion in “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” that postcolonial literature is always allegorical, in *Becoming* we read Abigail’s story, more than Nigeria’s history.

As for the representation of sexual violence, unlike all of Abigail’s erotic “voluntary” sexual encounters that are described in some detail, when it comes to rape by an unknown person, the description turns to the usual tropes of pain and torture. The first time Abigail is raped in London, the girl is awakened one night by Peter and a man at the door of her room; later, they will be joined by a petrified Mary. The man “pulled away [her bedclothes]. She scuttled back but he grabbed her and pushed his weight onto her. She fought him. Shouting. The sound caught deep in her throat. Calling for Mary. The man was like an incubus. The weight of his lust crushing her. [. . .] Peter smiled triumphantly; turning to the man, he said: ‘Fuck her. Fuck her hard’” (88). Abani’s inclusion of spectators in this sexually charged scene brings an element of titillation to the violence witnessed not present in the works previously analyzed-- Peter watching and encouraging the rape; Mary unable to react or help the child. Abigail, however, is no passive victim, as she knees her abuser with all her strength so that he finally leaves her. Enraged, Peter sentences the child to life in a doghouse: Abigail “[o]nly felt Peter grab her from behind, forcing her into the pillow. He handcuffed her. Arms behind her back. Slipped a harness with a ball into her mouth and over her head, chipping her teeth in the process. Grabbing her by the hair, he dragged her out of the bedroom. ‘You want to bite like a dog? I’ll treat you like a dog’” (89).

There, Abigail undergoes appalling tortures that include Peter raping her daily, starving her, peeing over her, and sometimes forcing her to drink “his piss” (92). “And this is how she

was made. Filth. Hunger. And drinking from the plate of rancid water. Bent forward like a dog. Arms behind her back. Kneeling. Into the mud. And the food. Tossed out leftovers. And the cold. And the numbing of limbs that was an even deeper cold. [. . .] Her shame was complete” (91). The narration continues, “Fifteen days, passing in the silence of snow. And she no longer fought when Peter mounted her” (95). Although the violence Peter inflicts on Abigail to “break” her into prostitution seems outrageous, Abani’s account is sadly realistic when compared with trafficked women’s testimonies. The tortures endured by sex slaves during the first weeks of their training as described by sociological data verge on ruthless sadism, while the intensity of the aggression frequently depends on the willingness of the victim to cooperate with pimps and traffickers.

By presenting such gruesome descriptions, the author averts “the possibility of denial or abstraction” on the part of readers who must confront the trauma the girl is experiencing (Novak 44). The power of Abani’s novella, then, lies in his subtly forcing the audience to acknowledge Abigail’s presence, and, by implication, that of trafficked minors in the developed world. Despite the tenor of the sexual aggression, Abani does not dilute the violence and thus prevents readers from approaching the subject of sex trafficking of minors from a safe distance (as, for example, García Márquez does in “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother,” where the Colombian author utilizes euphemisms and sarcasm to describe the cruel sexual exploitation of a child).⁷²

As for the tortures Abigail suffers in London, they showcase indirectly the character of the pimp/trafficker—as in Darko’s novel, a despicable African man. Interestingly, both African authors treat traffickers with little sympathy, providing no motivation or insight into their lives

⁷² In this tale, García Márquez resorts to irony and humor to tell a story of sexual exploitation, but, of course, the social message is clear and unambiguous; the style only makes it more “palatable” for the readers.

other than their cruelty and greed. The writers' commentary on patriarchy and exploitation in their home countries is evident. These representations suggest that women still constitute the most vulnerable group in African societies, while the unequal economic development between first and third world provides the grounds for a lucrative business where African men seize the opportunity for profit and act as intermediaries satisfying a demand. As an indictment of their own culture's role in the exploitation, both Darko and Abani represent African traffickers as unscrupulous and cruel, yet both works make it clear that the global economic context plays a crucial role and that those who will ultimately pay for sex with African women and girls are anonymous men from the global North—the ones with purchasing power.

In economic terms, trafficked women satisfy an increasing demand in more affluent nations, so African traffickers import them for some men to consume them, while authorities prosecute them for supplying the service. The unchanging variable in these narratives is that consumers for the most part remain anonymous. In Abani's novella, the majority of the men or boys who have had sex with Abigail, with a few exceptions, remain conspicuously absent from the text, although readers can assume that they have contributed to Abigail's progressive descent into alienation and death.

As far as the technicalities of the crime, much like with Mara in *Beyond*, Peter traffics Abigail into England with a "fake passport" and a "forged visa," so, for legal purposes, Abigail "was a ghost" (110). Under these circumstances, she initially remains under her trafficker's control. Yet once the British police find Abigail, her illegality does not translate into immediate deportation because her age pigeonholes her in the category of "victim." The child is thus placed under the care of the government social services—and readers may wonder if a detention center would have offered a wiser alternative to the male social worker's house.

The affair with Derek disturbs us. Presented from Abigail's point of view, the author leads the readers to suspend judgment and assume this as a chosen relationship where Abigail is finally getting the love and acceptance she craves. Abani gives us glimpses of some redeeming moments for Derek, such as when, after the rescue, he waits patiently for Abigail to start talking without pushing her, staying by her side for hours holding her hand while she sleeps. He initially seems caring and concerned for her well-being. He understands her love for literature and brings her a book that touches the girl's toughened heart. Yet that Abani characterizes a social worker having sex with a rescued child-patient betrays the social worker's lack of professionalism, while the broader context points to the poor standards demanded from those dealing with foreign victims of sex trafficking. Abani's ability to involve readers in the child's confused and traumatized mind generates both aversion towards Peter (the African trafficker) and sympathy towards Derek (the British social worker), even though both men are actually taking advantage of the child sexually. Abigail's subjectivity leads readers to forgive Derek, if reluctantly, yet when looking at their affair from a detached perspective (like that of the legal system at the end of the story), Derek becomes just another immature and egotistical predator in child's life.

The fourteen-year-old shows clear signs of psychological damage, which any moderately competent social worker would not miss. Derek has even seen the results of Abigail's self-mutilation in his own house, when one night after having sex with him, the girl heats a needle and uses her skin as a canvas to burn a map of indelible blisters all over her body. Her self-mutilation is no lesser detail. Children resort to such behavior as a symptom of their perceived little self-worth and acute trauma. Psychiatrists explain that they wound their bodies as a coping mechanism for the hurt they cannot verbalize, for the psychological wound to provoke a tangible pain more manageable than the emotional one, and for the numbing effect of the endorphins

released by the body to soothe it.⁷³ It does sound logical that Abigail would not discern the impact of her actions when harming herself, but readers can assume that any person in Derek's profession would know better than to take advantage of the child's conspicuous mental instability and hunger for a paternal figure.

That Abigail stays in the social worker's house also brings attention to the dearth of adequate resources devoted to dealing with victims of sex trafficking in destination countries, suggesting that victims of sexual exploitation often remain in a legal limbo--or in hell.⁷⁴ In reality, what to do with sex trafficking victims presents a difficult problem for authorities in destination countries, since subsequent action depends on the country's priorities and the resources allocated to them. If illegal immigrants and prostitutes are regarded as an unwanted group of disposable people, little will be invested in their welfare (Salman Rushdie, among other postcolonial writers, has written forcefully about the despondent situation of immigrants from poor countries in England).⁷⁵ Authorities generally alternate between confining girls in hospitals, if they are obviously hurt, or prisons; the victims' illegality only complicates their already perilous situation since their status will eventually result in deportation. In the story, Abigail "was being held" at a hospital that "felt more like a correctional facility" to her, while readers find no specific references as to how long or why she has been staying in Derek's house, other than to continue their affair—in fact, we don't even know when or where this dangerous liaison

⁷³ For a detailed description of this pathology, see Digby Tantam's *Understanding Repeated Self-Injury* (2009) and Steven Levenkron's *Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-mutilation* (1998).

⁷⁴ Closer to the end of the story, the narrator refers to Abigail "[b]ack at the hospital," so it is unclear whether Derek has removed her only temporarily from a hospital, or if the girl was living in Derek's house on a more permanent basis while awaiting a foster home, for example (Abani 117). In any case, that the social worker can take her from the hospital to his house only shows that Abigail's mental health is not of primordial concern for authorities who should have looked into her situation—after all, she has just been "rescued" from a traumatizing ordeal.

⁷⁵ See Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* (1981).

started (109). Readers also notice that everything comes to light because Derek's wife catches them having sex in their kitchen, not because the social services intervene or bother to follow up on Abigail's progress.

Abani thus implies that the British authorities have abandoned Abigail as much as the German government failed to protect Mara in Darko's tale.⁷⁶ The question remains, however: why does Derek, an agent of the British state system, sexually exploit Abigail in this novel? Perhaps because he "loves" her. Perhaps because Abigail is disposable. In any case, Derek's own weaknesses, insecurities, or psychological problems seem irrelevant. What Abani shows, most importantly, is that an underage trafficking victim does not generate enough concern or care to the state authorities who should protect her. Here, the sexual abuse has only changed hands: from an African trafficker, to a British social worker--the first one raped her by force; the second one seduced her into consensual sex. Once confronted with Derek's wife accusations, the legal system does work, yet, ironically, in Abigail's mind the state's actions only suffocate her and push her further down into depression. Derek and Abigail are forbidden to see each other again, and despite Abigail's incessant pleas to the court that this was "her" decision, Derek goes to prison (117).

As the tension grows along the pages, readers understand that Abigail's has been a life of loss: she has lost her mother at birth, and with that her father, who never emotionally recovers

⁷⁶ The British social system's flaws have been openly criticized in the media, especially after the abuse of some children escaped authorities for too long (with some children even dying). On February 1, 2011, the social affairs correspondent for the *Guardian* reported that "[c]hildren's services should be subject to random, unannounced inspections and Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills] should lose powers to evaluate the failings of key workers in abuse cases," based on what "an independent review of England's child protection system has found" (Ramesh). The main problem identified by Professor Eileen Munro "[i]n an interim report for education secretary Michael Gove [is that] the safety of children is being compromised because social workers spend too much time on paperwork and focusing on targets driven by the requirements of Ofsted evaluations" (Ramesh). This report was specifically addressing negligence due to excessive bureaucracy and inefficiency, not social workers sexually abusing local or trafficked children, but it reveals cracks in the system that Abani incorporates into his story.

and ends up killing himself; she loses her innocence at ten when a cousin rapes her and threatens to kill her if she ever tells anyone; she loses her freedom and dignity at her trafficker's house; she loses her lover because the laws do not allow for that relationship to prosper. In the end, rather than remain once again in the hands of the British social services or other exploitative men, Abigail decides to take control of her body, the only possession she has left. In this way, where the legal system has deemed her a victim, Abigail becomes an agent. The child does not meet a conventional happy ending, but, arguably, for once she has chosen a path for herself with no one trampling on her decision. Haunted, traumatized, and scarred, she determines to put an end to a life of abuse and neglect. The narrative closes with Abigail standing at the sphinxes by the river Thames, "contemplating the full measure of *her* decision" [my emphasis] (119).⁷⁷

5.3 Conclusion

Both *Beyond* and *Becoming*, though admittedly tough to read because of their occasional crudity, are fruitful representations of trafficked women's situations from the perspective of postcolonial "hybrid" writers who have experienced life in both the global South and the global North, without becoming Spivak's "native informants" for the West. The authors bring attention to the undeniable role patriarchal African cultures play in the exploitation of women, but, perhaps more disturbingly, they uncover how first-world states contribute to the exploitation of third-world victims of sex trafficking through inefficient and xenophobic laws in destination countries. These novels highlight a contradictory reality, where "Africans themselves become the latest natural resource exported to the West" to perform an increasingly demanded service (in

⁷⁷ This London spot bears an association with suicide. Whether the infamous reputation of Cleopatra's Needle (as the obelisk is generally called) is still true today or merely an urban legend, Abani's location choice is relevant because it suggests that Abigail will probably kill herself.

this case, provide sex) but, once there, they are criminalized and punished for not legally belonging (Novak 43).

Darko looks especially at patriarchy in her own culture and how female exploitation can be taken to extremes when women are removed from their communities (in terms of family and home country) because they lose all protection by remaining outside the law and thus depend entirely on their African and European traffickers. The women's illegality is actually the condition that ensures their silence and subordination. Abani, for his part, centers his novella in Abigail's subjectivity and the sexual abuse she receives in her native country, which leads readers to understand why she ends up choosing such a disturbing relationship with the British social worker. By crafting a social worker as a final agent of abuse in Abigail's life, Abani sheds light on the perilous state of rescued trafficked girls in destination countries, while he exposes a bureaucratic system that does not assign dignity or importance to victims, but rather treats them as a problem the state needs to get rid of. The authors remind us that Mara's and Abigail's circumstances, like those of countless African women and girls trafficked to the West, are real, and that similar cases are happening now, under the complacent eyes of Western societies reluctant to acknowledge any responsibility in their trafficking. Instead, victims are regarded as unwanted intruders in the developed world, and here lies the power of Darko's and Abani's work: in unveiling through "very intimate portraits" a public issue that, according to the statistics, has achieved genocidal proportions (qtd. in Ellis 22). Ultimately, what the current discourse on migration implies is that some lives are worth living (legal citizens') and others are disposable (illegal migrants').⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See Segura and Zavella for an excellent analysis of migration from the so-called developing to developed nations. The editors focus on the US-Mexican border, observing the policies adopted to stop illegal immigration and showing how the numbers of preventable deaths have risen to an alarming degree because the safest crossing paths

Both authors illuminate the reality that sex trafficking continues because the demand in Western countries persists and grows. Darko and Abani hint that their female protagonists have experienced xenophobia and racism in Europe, but as Said has analyzed in *Orientalism*, those white men who despise them also desire them, providing enough reason for traffickers to continue to import African girls into the “overdeveloped” world (Gilroy 220). The post-independence global economic configuration has generated more social divisions, especially after free market policies were forcefully implemented in the 1960s in third world countries. With these changes came the vital need to migrate in search of survival. Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella observe that “[t]he magnitude and intensity of transnational migration has created tremendous transformations in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres” that demand solutions and approaches other than punitive for illegal immigrants (2). In the case of trafficked women, sociological studies prove that all the penalties only turn them into easy prey of traffickers and consumers, so novels like *Becoming* and *Beyond* highlight the need to think of alternatives.

Not coincidentally, both works’ ends are bittersweet: Mara remains a prostitute hooked on drugs, and Abigail puts an end to her life. The heroines of these tales claim agency and act in what they consider to be their best interest given their constrained possibilities, but their outcomes do not bring much relief. In this respect, some NGOs have actively tried to create a conscience worldwide and persuade governments to stop prosecuting trafficked women for illegality and prostitution. Some analysts even suggest granting legal citizenship to foreign

have been militarized, leaving only the extremely dangerous areas as an option for potential immigrants. Regarding the laws on healthcare for illegal citizens once inside the US, the editors notice that preventing illegal immigrant mothers from accessing prenatal care has caused a considerable rise in birth problems and deaths. The US government places the blame on the migrant who subjected herself/himself to the perilous conditions of migrating illegally, but the subtext, of course, is that these people’s lives are expendable.

victims of sex trafficking as a way of stopping the illicit cycle, but, predictably, this initiative has encountered hostility in first world states. Immigration and nationhood still constitute paradigms fiercely defended by national governments clinging to an ideal of racial purity akin to notorious fascist regimes of the past, which have lately begun to resurface with the increasing influx of poor immigrants into the developed world.

At the same time, by listening to former sex slaves' claims that capturing and prosecuting them for prostitution, or rescuing and placing them in detention centers or hospitals while awaiting trial does not help, but traumatizes them more, we can see that the authorities have been missing the point. In "Distortions and Difficulties in Data for Trafficking," Bebe Loff and Jyoti Sanghera remind us of the importance of asking "trafficked people themselves about the problems they face and involve them in finding solutions [as well as being] aware of the [. . .] risks that come from being a non-citizen or illegal alien" (566). For it to become effective, then, action should generate from those affected, not imposed from above. Only when these women's voices are heard—thus the relevance of Darko's and Abani's works--and governments begin to pay attention to what they need (instead of the authorities' subjective assessment of their needs), will we see change and some hope for them on the horizon.

By narrating the stories of women sexually exploited as a result of their transnational migration, these authors attempt to awaken audiences to the effects of "illegality" and "citizenship" for those caught in it, revealing the cracks within schizophrenic societies whose legal institutions, through exclusion and domination, attempt to enact a façade of coherence that collapses in the presence of imported sexual slaves. Thus far, we have followed the wretched lives of sex trafficked victims/survivors. In a more daring stylistic move, however, the novel analyzed in the next chapter will only show us their deaths.

**6 Sex Trafficking, State Patriarchy, and Transnational Capital in Roberto Bolaño's
2666**

The U.S.-Mexican border
es una herida abierta [is an open wound]
where the Third World
grates against the First and bleeds

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*

While the previous chapter explored international migration from Africa to Europe propelled by economic necessity at the expense of abuse and marginalization, this final analysis pushes the limits of such “unavoidable” reality by highlighting the most horrific side of female migrants’ exploitation. Nowhere in this study will the discourse on class and race become more blatant than in Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* and his representation of sexual violence against women.

To bring a useful analogy, American readers may remember the dreadful case of a female jogger raped in Central Park in 1989; if only vaguely, you may perhaps recall that the incident prompted Donald Trump to take out “a full-page ad in four New York newspapers demanding that New York ‘Bring Back the Death Penalty, Bring Back Our Police’” (Crenshaw 184-5). Miraculously, the victim survived the brutal attack, but her case outraged the community and was widely reported and assiduously followed—now there is even a *Wikipedia* entry under “Central Park Jogger case” explaining the nuances of the horror that this white, Yale-educated woman, who at the time worked in investment banking, endured.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ By providing details on the victim’s social and cultural background, I am only trying to establish her class and race as they will be relevant to my analysis of the rapes and murders occurring in the US-Mexican border. At the same time, there are plenty of studies demonstrating that, while some sectors of the female population are obviously more vulnerable, domestic violence “is now so widespread that the American Medical Association has declared it ‘a public health problem that has reached epidemic proportions’” (Ebert 248-9). In this case, I wanted to bring attention to what type of victims generate more media coverage and public outrage. It is also worth mentioning

Without minimizing the completely undeserved violation this woman suffered, readers may be curious about the reaction—more specifically, whose reaction—this case generated, especially considering that there were 3,254 other cases of rape reported in New York that year, “twenty-eight” during that fateful week alone (Crenshaw 185):

Many of these rapes were as horrific as the rape in Central Park, yet all were virtually ignored by the media. Some were gang rapes, and in a case that prosecutors described as “one of the most brutal in recent years,” a woman was raped, sodomized, and thrown fifty feet off the top of a four-story building in Brooklyn. Witnesses testified that the victim “screamed as she plunged down the air shaft. . . . She suffered fractures of both ankles and legs, her pelvis was shattered and she suffered internal injuries. This rape survivor, like most of the other forgotten victims that week, was a woman of color [and, if I may add, of a different social class]. (Crenshaw 185)

Explaining why the Central Park jogger spiraled into a media spectacle and prompted the intervention of a New York-based real estate mogul by now would be stating the obvious. The reason all the other cases generated little or no attention seems, admittedly, shameful.

The above case, though utterly unfortunate, reflects a clear difference between victims of sexual violence who receive attention and action and those ignored because of their “worthlessness” in terms of class and race within the current neoliberal model. The insignificance of the abject presence of third-world women is paradoxical in light of the fact that they have now been turned into a key component for the global economic engine to run

that Donald Trump clearly has vested interests in the retail value of the real estate around Central Park and its perception as a “safe” area for potential buyers.

smoothly—an engine that, as suggested in Gloria Anzaldúa’s metaphor, is being lubricated with subaltern women’s (literal) blood.

Readers may then be outraged to learn about the shockingly high rates of rape and murder of “disposable” women that have been occurring since 1993, one year after the signing of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This treaty facilitated the installation of “maquiladoras”--assembly plants for transnational corporations (80% of them American-owned) that mushroomed in the new export processing zones (EPZs).⁸⁰ As a consequence, widespread migration to the border, especially female, skyrocketed.⁸¹ Taking “signs for wonders,” many saw these maquiladoras as a capitalist-God-sent blessing, feeling that they would bring a much needed boost to the Mexican economy. In fact, during their stay in Ciudad Juarez--the largest border city, “literally within walking distance of El Paso, Texas”--these plants allowed the municipality to boast the lowest unemployment rate of all Mexico (and, later, less glamorously, the highest incidence of domestic violence in the country) (Rodriguez 5).

Like sweatshops, maquiladoras offered women the possibility of economic independence--at an appallingly exploitative price, of course, but some independence nonetheless. Looking for these new jobs, migrants from poor states such as Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and even poor countries like Guatemala, flooded Ciudad Juarez, forcing the city to accommodate the demands of a rapid population explosion. It is worth mentioning that a

⁸⁰ NAFTA not only harmed the situation of semi-skilled Mexican workers, but also American ones. As Chomsky notes, “it was obvious that [the NAFTA agreement] was just going to have a *devastating* effect on American labor, and probably a devastating effect on Mexican labor too, though of course it [would] be highly beneficial to American investors, and probably also to Mexican investors. It’s also certain to have a highly destructive effect on the environment—because its laws supersede federal and state legislation” (281). Chomsky further adds that “its advocates in the United States were saying [that it would be good, as it would] only harm semi-skilled workers—footnote: 70% of the workforce” (281).

⁸¹ Some examples of maquiladoras (“maquilas” for short) that were established along the US-Mexican border include Ford, General Electric, General Motors, RCA, and Chrysler, to name a few.

job at a maquiladora is considered so exploitative and underpaid that the local population of border cities such as Ciudad Juárez would rather find other types of jobs instead; consequently, the “maquila” jobs have been filled primarily by migrants from pauperized Mexican states or impoverished Central American countries.⁸² Ironically, part of the NAFTA agreement stipulated that the foreign assembly plants would be exempt from taxation in the host country, so the costs of social services and infrastructure generated by the influx of these migrant workers could never be met by the city’s already meager budget.⁸³ As a result, the city’s slums grew exponentially, while basic services such as electricity, sewage, transportation, and public safety for these areas lagged behind, creating a breeding ground for the crimes against women for which Ciudad Juárez became notorious: the “femicides.”

Mexico, a country that during his stay in 1938 struck André Breton as the most “surreal” in the world, becomes the stage for the gendered sexual terror in Roberto Bolaño’s narrative. Profoundly intrigued by horror of the violence and the impunity with which the perpetrators of the femicides operated, Bolaño began steady correspondence with Sergio González Rodríguez, one of the Mexican journalists covering the murders in Ciudad Juárez with courageous rigor. The result was *2666* (published posthumously in 2004), Bolaño’s monumental last novel in which the writer sheds a tenebrous light on the way in which transnational capital, patriarchy, and the state have enabled the vicious deaths of subaltern “disposable” women. Here, the structural economic

⁸² Ciudad Juárez (called Santa Teresa in this novel) is just one among several cities where maquiladoras were settled, but it is the biggest and the focus of Bolaño’s book. For that reason, I am utilizing it as an example that epitomizes the situation.

⁸³ Teresa Rodríguez explains that “[u]nder NAFTA, tax breaks enjoyed by the maquiladora industry [were] no longer [. . .] confined to the border area but they [became] available throughout Mexico. The US and Mexican governments anticipated that the provision would entice manufacturers to leave the overstressed border area and expand into Mexico’s interior”; however, their calculations were wrong, as “the maquiladoras of northern region increased employment dramatically” instead of moving somewhere else (8).

situation, with the majority of the population living in dire poverty and forced to migrate to the dangerous US-Mexican border in a quest for survival, combines with patriarchy and widespread impunity in a lethal concoction. The abduction, rape, mutilation and murder of more than 500 women in Ciudad Juárez thus becomes a patent example of the degree to which deregulated capital and state patriarchy have contributed to the atrocities that have occurred after the signing of NAFTA.⁸⁴ Indeed, an economic system that privileges profits over lives won't invest much in people's safety and well-being; quite the contrary, since the constant supply of cheap labor because of these women's extreme economic hardships turns them into low-cost replaceable commodities.

Basing his writing in the real crimes, Bolaño finds a rather unusual way of linking neoliberalism and patriarchy with sexual violence against subaltern women, yet there lies one of the strongest lures of his novel: through impassive repetition of the horror, the author showcases an extreme example of an economic system that privileges profits over lives. To this day, no responsible party has been found for the Juárez femicides and, as time passes and contexts change--if it wasn't for novels like the one under analysis--these women may very well end up lost in oblivion. After all, like New York's "unimportant" rape victims, they are poor and they are dark.

6.1 The Semantics of Neoliberalism and Subaltern Female Rape

Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño eludes easy judgment from critics and readers alike. He "emerged" in the 1990s and brought a fresh voice to Latin American narratives (so tightly associated with magic realism), fusing his individual talent with a tradition spearheaded by

⁸⁴ To this day, no guilty parties have been found, but the FBI speculates that the criminal/s could be American citizens, while sectors of the Mexican police prefer to believe that the killers are home-based (Rodriguez 98, 100).

established literary figures such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa, to name some of the most prominent Latin American writers who, like Bolaño, managed to transcend continental boundaries. Despite his undeniable merits, Bolaño's position in the canon is still debated, but because of his increasing readership and significant critical impact, we can foresee that this author will soon share the podium with other Latin American literary icons. Bolaño's conspicuous omission from Carlos Fuentes's recent *La Gran Novela Latinoamericana* [The Great Latin American Novel], where Fuentes analyzes the trajectory of Latin American literature from colonial times to the present, speaks of the degree of caution with which some canonical writers have approached the author, while, at the same time, many critics and readers especially in Latin America and Europe rave about his work and have propelled Bolaño to stardom.¹ In the United States, Susan Sontag's blessing of Bolaño's earlier work as "the real thing, and the rest," has certainly contributed to his welcoming into the American literary market (qtd. in Stavans). An undeniable provocateur, by the time of his death at age fifty, many critics concurred that Bolaño "was widely considered the most important Latin American novelist since Gabriel García Márquez" (Valdes 9). Controversies aside, Bolaño has achieved the status of a cult author whose literary gift gained him entrance to the demanding circle of academia, where it looks like he will remain.⁸⁵

Like that of Borges (whom he deeply admired), Bolaño's work is difficult to define because of its intellectual sophistication, and yet, for all its stylistic ambition, a raw sense of humor drawn from the most ordinary circumstances pervades the pages. In *The New York Review of Books*, Sarah Kerr observes that

⁸⁵ For further details on Bolaño's critical reception, see Pollack (2009), Stavans (2008), Zavala (2006), and Corral (2006).

the results of his work are multi-dimensional, in a way that runs ahead of a critic's one-at-a-time powers of description. Highlight Bolaño's conceptual play and you risk missing the sex and viscera in his work. Stress his ambition and his many references and you conjure up threats of exclusive high-modernist obscurity, or literature as a sterile game, when the truth is it's hard to think of a writer who is less of a snob, or—in the double sense of exposing us to unsavory things and carrying seeds for the future—less sterile. (Kerr)

Indeed, Bolaño's work is anything but sterile. Throughout his short but productive literary career (nine books in seven years), the author chose topics with heavy social weight, generally veiled in the background of his characters' lives, yet unmistakably present in the narratives. When confronted with questions about his politics, like James Joyce, Bolaño often diverted his answer towards fiction, linking his ethics with his aesthetics--there lies the canvas where he addresses intensely politicized material (Macaya 129). If anything, exposing evil and violence becomes a constant in Bolaño's oeuvre: his books have dealt with Nazism, the infamous abuses committed during the Chilean military government of Augusto Pinochet, the army raid on Mexico's UNAM University in 2000, and the vicious rapes and murders of women on the US-Mexican border at the center of *2666* (125).

In this last novel, Bolaño enlivens Gloria Anzaldua's border metaphor with uncomfortable harshness.⁸⁶ Like in the previous chapters, then, I will examine the depiction of violated subaltern women, the representation of sexual violence committed against them, the presence (or absence) of their aggressors, and the responsibility of legitimized institutions in

⁸⁶ The number on the title evokes apocalyptic evil; it was first referenced in the author's *Amulet* (1999), where "a threatening late-night street resembles a 'cemetery in the year 2666'" (Tyler).

condoning such crimes. In turn, the disturbing reality represented by Bolaño's *2666* can serve as a springboard to scrutinizing a world order that compels us to imagine new alternatives to unbounded economic exploitation, male privilege, and gendered violence. By interrogating the assumptions unsettled in Bolaño's narrative, readers can reflect upon the ethical responsibilities towards third-world women in the face of the current global economic context that continues to exploit them, as *2666* shows, to a brutal extreme.

This novel's storyline is intricate and unpredictable. In a cryptic style reminiscent of Borges, the author weaves together the first world and the third world through a mystery: all roads lead to the female murders in Santa Teresa, a city first conceived in his earlier novel *The Savage Detectives* (1998), while the mysterious title originally came to light in his following novel *Amulet* (1999). The author divided the book into five parts, each one addressing the lives of apparently unrelated characters who converge (at different times) on the city of death. Placed at the core of the novel, the gruesome deaths of countless poor and racialized women become the Lacanian "real" of Bolaño's narrative—the ugly, traumatic, and ever-present junction where many different characters intersect.⁸⁷ For the sake of keeping the focus on the relation between sexual abduction of subaltern women, state patriarchy, and global capital, this chapter will explore Part Four, "The Part about the Crimes," referring to the other parts where they relate and contribute to our understanding of the femicides and the structural causes enabling them.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ At the time Bolaño was writing, the number of victims was estimated at five hundred is an estimate number of the victims; some sources calculate that by now there have been more than 1,000 femicides (see Fregoso's *Mexicana Encounters*).

⁸⁸ I want to acknowledge that this analysis will not do justice to the complexities of Bolaño's novel in all its magnitude and scope, with its almost nine hundred pages in the English version. The structure of the book in fact allows such liberty, since many critics have agreed that each part can stand on its own, and that they can follow any other arrangement without altering the novel's unity (Bolaño actually expected to publish them separately). That Bolaño died before the book's completion adds to the intrigues surrounding *2666*, but his family and editors have

Still, a brief summary of the entire text may help readers. In Part One, “The Part about the Critics,” we find a group of European literary critics from “old” imperial Italy, Spain, England, and France who meet because of their interest in an enigmatic German writer: Benno von Archimboldi. Their search for the author leads them to Santa Teresa, Mexico, where they learn by accident of the female murders. Part Two, “The Part about Amalfitano,” deals with a Chilean professor and translator of some of Archimboldi’s works, Oscar Amalfitano, self-exiled after the military coup in his native country and now living in Santa Teresa with his beautiful seventeen-year-old daughter. Despite dwelling in the “infernal” city, their social class separates them from the perils of migrant workers and allows them to live (for the most part) unaffected by the dangers facing poor women (Bolaño 436). Part Three, “The Part about Fate,” concerns the African-American journalist Antonio Fate, who comes from New York to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match for an African-American newspaper. Again, by chance, he learns about the murders. Fate wants to write a report on the killings, which are strikingly unknown in the US, but his editor denies his request on the grounds that there are no African-Americans involved. Part Four, “The Part about the Crimes,” centers on the femicides: one by one, we hear a litany of murders described in aseptic, disengaged language. In between, Bolaño sprinkles references that could possibly account for the violence. The last pages of Part Four, for example, reveal that a well-to-do woman (Kelly Rivera Parker) has disappeared, and we later discover that she has been involved in organizing a prostitution ring that caters to powerful circles in Santa Teresa. Readers also hear about “the porn film industry and the underground subindustry of snuff films”—a veiled

claimed that the book was practically finished before the author’s death and that the version that has reached the public remains faithful to what the writer intended.

suggestion that Santa Teresa could be the world capital of the snuff movie (541).⁸⁹ The last part of the novel, “The Part about Archimboldi,” uncovers the past and present of the elusive writer Benno von Archimboldi, who travels to Mexico with the intention of helping his German nephew, imprisoned and accused of committing the femicides.

The female victims of abduction dominate Part Four. In attempting to symbolize the unutterable, Bolaño resorts to an innovative stylistic technique: constant repetition of fragmented post-mortem snippets that don’t reveal much about the women’s lives. From a clearly detached perspective, the author unsettles his audience with descriptions of countless corpses showing signs of torture and sexual violence. As Julia Kristeva observes in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, “[t]he corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall) [. . .] upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance[.] The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything[; the corpse] is the utmost of abjection” (3-4).

Unlike the works previously analyzed, where the victim/survivor of sexual violence (potentially Eveline, but unmistakably Soon-ah, Douloti, Mara, or Abigail) is the live protagonist, here the author offers a new way of seeing these abducted women, whom we encounter only as anonymous mutilated bodies once they have already been kidnapped, tortured, raped, and killed. Readers are not privy to the victims’ stories or motivations, but are forced instead to put together the pieces of a puzzle in order to understand why these women constantly show up dead in some dumpster or the desert while the author, consistent with his style, never promises a satisfying resolution. Indeed, the point seems less to find the killer(s) than to become engulfed in the horror happening in Santa Teresa, a stage that almost feels set up for the

⁸⁹ “Snuff” films are illegal movies that depict actual rape or murder instead of resorting to special effects.

perpetrators to elude justice and disappear. Just like in real-life Ciudad Juarez, those who abduct, rape, and murder remain conspicuously absent from the pages.

Part Four thus begins with the appearance of a body that will be followed by countless more: “The girl’s body turned up in a vacant lot in Colonia Las Flores. She was dressed in a white long-sleeved T-shirt and yellow knee-length skirt, a size too big. Some children found her and told their parents. One of the mothers called the police, who showed up half an hour later. [. . .] We’ve never seen her before. She isn’t from around here, poor thing” (353). Reading along, we learn that “[t]his happened in 1993. January 1993. From then on, the killings of women began to be counted” (353). But the narrator reminds that “surely there were other girls and women who died in 1992. Other girls and women who didn’t make it onto the list or were never found” (353). Later, the body of the alleged first victim claims an identity: “Esperanza [which in Spanish suggestively means “hope”] Gomez Saldaña and she was thirteen” (353). A judge and some Santa Teresa policemen examine the body and determine that the girl had been “strangled to death[,] vaginally and anally raped, probably more than once, since both orifices exhibited tears and abrasions, from which she had bled profusely” (354). Once the autopsy concludes, a “black orderly, who moved north from Veracruz years ago, put the body away in the freezer” (354).

In the above passage, the author immediately establishes definite features of this victim. The girl’s outfit, contrary to the insidious speculations of Mexican police throughout, hints that she is not a prostitute. When describing her clothes, Bolaño chooses adjectives such as “long-sleeved” or “knee-length,” subverting patriarchal discourses that blame victims of rape on their “provocative” attire. Esperanza was thirteen, which in the context of this analysis does not rule out the possibility of prostitution, but it seems unlikely that such a young girl would voluntarily

choose this trade. In real life, the victims were as young as eight and nine years old, so deliberate prostitution becomes a scenario difficult to picture (while that accusation understandably enraged their families). We also know that, reflecting the situation of myriad migrant workers who travel from pauperized states in search of a job at the border, the “poor thing” has come from somewhere else, and thus we can infer her indigence. Finally, the type of violence endured proves that she has been abducted for sexual purposes (leaving an open question about motivations other than sadistic rape) and, of course, that the perpetrator is a man. That the thirteen-year-old Esperanza (hope?) ends up in a freezer after an expert inspects her body shows that she has morphed into an object now, a number on a list--and there will be many more to come.

Readers then follow along the pages where one female body after another appears, while their description remains basically the same. As if perusing a forensic report, we often find an unknown female body, generally petite, long-haired, and dark-skinned with the following characteristics: we learn that the body has been vaginally and anally raped (the “two-way” rape, as the police baptize it); the body has been tortured (most commonly with one breast severed and a nipple cut or bitten); the body shows signs of strangulation (fracture of the hyoid bone with hands or ropes); the body has been dumped (in the desert or one of the many city dumpsters); with luck, the body may be identified (frequently, a maquiladora worker snatched on her way to work), but, more often than not, the body ends up in a common grave, forever unknown. In between, we hear about the incompetence and negligence of the police, the apathy of state authorities, the lack of cooperation of maquiladora managers, the harassment endured by journalists investigating the story, and the pervasiveness of violence against women.

Suggestively, Bolaño does not limit his representations to the infamous cases of serial abduction/rape/murder, although those recur throughout. In this way, Bolaño showcases that violence against women in general has become the “natural” state of affairs. By describing different contexts, the author insinuates that patriarchal violence is so pervasive that the orchestrator(s) of the femicides “Esperanza-style” have found in Santa Teresa a safe haven to let their evil impulses free. Even though the majority of the victims represented fall under Esperanza’s killers’ *modus operandi*--symptomatic of an organized crime--many unrelated female rapes and murders find a place in these pages, highlighting the danger especially lower-class women are exposed to both in the domestic and the public spheres. As Mexican women’s activist Esther Chavez Cano declares, “In this city [Ciudad Juárez], it is a disgrace to be a woman and much greater of a disgrace to be a poor woman” (qtd. in Rodriguez 113).

Right after Esperanza’s vignette, for instance, we learn that “five days later[,] Luisa Celina Vazquez was strangled. She was sixteen years old, sturdily built, fair-skinned, and five months pregnant” (Bolaño 354). Readers may initially assume that, because of the strangulation, this is another victim of serial abduction, rape, and murder. The narrator gives us some clues pointing otherwise, though, as the prototypical femicide victim tends to be petite and dark-skinned, while the murder weapon--Luisa Celina was “strangled with a television cord”—pigeonholes the murder into the domestic violence category (354). Apparently, her lover killed her “in a fit of insanity” because she wanted to terminate their relationship (354-5). And that is all we are allowed to know for this particular case. Yet the more we dive into the pages, it becomes clearer that, along with the mysterious serial abductors, boyfriends, husbands, and lovers also kill.

The next scene shows that another female body has appeared “in an alley in the center of the city” (355). “She was about thirty and dressed in a black skirt and low-cut white blouse. She had been stabbed to death [. . .] In her purse was a ticket for the nine a.m. bus to Tucson, a bus she would never catch. Also found were a lipstick, powder, eyeliner, Kleenex, a half-empty pack of cigarettes, and a package of condoms” (355). From the content of her purse, the police would probably assume that she was a prostitute and hence ignore her murder. Several scenes later, for example, the police find another female body in the desert with “red-painted nails, which lead the first officers on the scene to think she was a whore” (520). Within the official discourse surrounding the crimes, it is not only obviously sex-related objects such as condoms but also (more worryingly) innocuous ones such as red nail polish and lipstick--clearly feminine markers--that determine the alleged promiscuity of the victim. The assumption female victims have transgressed established social norms is used to explain their rapes and murders and to justify the lack of interest in solving them. Half-way into Part Four, it does not surprise readers to hear that “[w]hen the forensic report finally arrived (the cause of death probably some kind of stab wound), everyone had forgotten the case, even the media, and the body was tossed up without further ado into the public grave” (520). Practically all of the cases, regardless of the victims’ presumed status, end like that.

In order to reinforce these women’s invisibility, Bolaño introduces in Part Four the case of the “church desecrator,” a man who breaks into churches to urinate on their floors, prompting a more aggressive police investigation than the biggest serial killing case in the history of Mexico (and the world?). By this inclusion, the author suggests that even religion plays a part in diverting attention from violence against the “superexploited,” a theme thoroughly explored by other Latin American writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez. In 2666,

only after the first “attacks” on the churches does a national newspaper send an art correspondent (Sergio Gonzalez) to cover the story of the “Penitent,” as the sacraphobe was called, thus demonstrating that government officials in Mexico City are more concerned with church politics than with the femicides (376). Nothing much changes, however: when Gonzales returns to the capital city, he writes a report on the church desecrator and for a while forgets about the murdered women. The media in Santa Teresa does not offer any hope either: “[t]he attacks on [the churches of] San Rafael and San Tadeo got more attention in the local press than the women killed in the preceding months” (Bolaño 366). As for the police, they were too busy “wasting their time watching the city’s churches twenty-four hours a day” to ever give the femicides investigation a credible chance, generally because the victim’s morality came under immediate scrutiny, evidencing the deep-rooted distrust and misogyny latent in the officers’ minds (405).

In a provocative scene, Bolaño satirizes some officers’ staunch chauvinism during a breakfast gathering where the cops in charge of the investigation relax and exchange jokes about women:

And the joker teller said: all right friends, what’s the definition of a woman?

Silence. And the answer: *pues* a vagina surrounded by a more or less organized

bunch of cells. And then someone laughed, an inspector, good one[,] a bunch of

cells. And another joke, international this time: why is the Statue of Liberty a

woman? Because they needed an empty head for the observation deck. And

another one: how many parts a woman’s head is divided into? *Pues* that depends,

valedores! Depends on what [. . .]? Depends on how hard you hit her. (552)

The list goes on, and the cruelty intensifies. “Then the inspector, exhausted after a night’s work, wondered to himself how much of God’s truth lay hidden in ordinary jokes. And [in an obvious

sign of hypermasculinity] he scratched his crotch and dropped his Smith & Wesson model 686” (553). He goes on: “God’s truth, said the inspector. Who the fuck comes up with jokes? [. . .] Who’s the first to *think them up*?” (553). The man then remembers a final truism: “women are like laws, they were made to be broken. And the laughter was general” (553). Needless to say, when these are the men in charge of preventing the murders in Santa Teresa, one stops wondering why the femicides are happening and starts thinking instead why not.⁹⁰

According to Rosa Linda Fregoso, the official discourse initially constructed the victims of the femicides on the US-Mexican border as naïve or irresponsible individuals who transgressed the normal order: in Mexico, the place of a respectable woman is still within her family, be that with her father or her husband, so those who dare leave the sanctity of the familial unit in search of work and more economic independence pose a threat and, in a way, deserve their fate for contravening established norms (*Mexicana Encounters* 3). Fregoso further explains that the female victims have been represented “not simply as victims of globalization but as subjects in need of patriarchal regulation” (10). Even well-intended documentaries on the feminicides like *Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos*, Fregoso suggests, insinuate that “women are killed for engaging in activities that exceed patriarchal gendered ‘norms’: hanging out in bars or on the street, working in the sex industry,” thus the need for their surveillance and policing (10). Emilia Escalante San Juan’s death in the novel, for instance, is explained by the police quite creatively: she was a worker at the maquiladora “New Markets” and “didn’t have a husband, although once every two months she went out to clubs downtown, with friends from work, where she usually drank and went off with some man. Practically a whore, said the police” (Bolaño

⁹⁰ The author is careful not to portray all the police officers in a negative light. One of his characters, Lalo Cura, tries to investigate and solve the cases, but he lacks resources and support from those above him. In real Ciudad Juárez, police officers only need a certificate showing that they have passed sixth grade in order to qualify for the job. At the same time, we should acknowledge that they are underpaid and exposed to extreme dangers.

460). Such is the frustrating answer that readers repeatedly encounter; the rest remains an enigma.

In Part Four, for example, Sergio Gonzalez, the journalist who has spent time in Santa Teresa and has first-hand knowledge of the femicides through his short investigation, stubbornly clings to the hegemonic narrative disseminated by the police and the media (“God’s truth,” as the inspector would say). Yet the femicides continue to haunt him. Once in Mexico City, after having sex with a prostitute, he briefs the prostitute on his knowledge of the cases and asks for the woman’s opinion about the murders in Santa Teresa. When the prostitute confesses her ignorance about the subject, Gonzalez protests “that they were killing whores, so why not show a little professional solidarity, to which the whore replied that he was wrong, in the story as he had told it the women dying were factory workers, not whores. Workers, workers, she said” (466). This reflection stuns Gonzalez, who despite having personally researched the killings, has clearly become interpellated by the discourse the police have circulated and has accepted it at the expense of his own findings: “[a]nd then Sergio apologized, and, as if a lightbulb had gone over his head, he glimpsed an aspect of the situation that until now he’d overlooked” (466).

In fact, we only know for sure that men are abducting these working-class women for sexual purposes. For the most part, these abject corpses are the only “real” mark we find within a web of uncertain speculations. When the journalist Sergio González interrogates a police inspector trying to confirm his findings, he does not go very far: “As I understand it, [González says,] the women are kidnapped in one place, raped and killed somewhere else, and finally dumped in a third place. [. . .] Sometimes it’s like that, [the inspector] said, but the killings don’t all follow the same pattern” (Bolaño 560-1). Throughout, ignorance rules. Yet while both in actual Ciudad Juárez and fictive Santa Teresa we still cannot pinpoint exactly why or by whom

the victims have been raped, tortured, and killed--in the words of a police inspector, we “shouldn’t try to find a logical explanation for the crimes. It’s fucked up, that is the only explanation”--, the author includes two incidents that coincide with some of the stronger hypotheses on the Juárez murders: one, that the women could be kidnapped to have sex with men from powerful circles in the area; two, that they could be unwilling “actresses” in snuff movies (561). Both possibilities fall under the Palermo protocol’s definition of sex trafficking.

By the end of “The Part about the Crimes,” Kelly Rivera Parker, a well-off congresswoman’s friend, has disappeared. Through the help of Sergio Gonzalez’s investigation, the politician learns that Kelly used to organize “parties” (initially with models, but later with prostitutes and poor local girls) in “narcorranchos” where narcos and the moneyed elites of Santa Teresa gathered. The guests’ resumes can only alarm: Kelly planned parties for a man who “owned a fleet of garbage trucks and was said to have an exclusive contract with most of the maquiladoras in Santa Teresa,” a “businessman with interests in Sonora, Sinaloa, and Jalisco,” and other with “connections to the Santa Teresa cartel [the Juarez cartel?]” (628).

So at Kelly’s parties “we have a banker[,] a businessman[,] a millionaire,[and several narcos], as well as other personages from the worlds of society, crime and politics. A collection of worthies” (629). Suggestively, these socialites’ bodyguards drive “black Suburbans or Spirits or Peregrinos,” the vehicles which some of the victims have been spotted entering (sometimes by force, sometimes on their own volition) before appearing later dead and mutilated in some illegal dumpster or the desert (627). Speculating that these mafias can pull enough strings to silence some corrupt sectors of the local/national government and the police does not sound far-fetched, which Bolaño seems to suggest by including such a “collection of worthies” in Part Four. As one

reporter assures Antonio Fate, the protagonist journalist of Part Three, “[t]he arm of the killers is long, very long,” and it can certainly stretch and caress powerful circles in Mexico City (297).

The snuff hypothesis is as mysterious as the snuff industry itself. To this day, many doubt that these movies actually exist, arguing that they are an urban myth, but one that stubbornly persists. In 2666, a journalist from Buenos Aires comes to write a report on the femicides. Once in Santa Teresa, and after some negotiation, he sees an alleged snuff movie and later writes “a long article about the killings of women in Santa Teresa. The article centered on the porn film industry and the underground subindustry of snuff films” (541). Bolaño also alludes to the snuff porn industry in another of his books, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (1996), where he traces the imaginary lives of far-right “artistic” fascists in North and South America. One of the most sinister characters, Ramirez Hoffman, is suspected of having participated in the filming of pornographic movies and killing all the actors—in *Nazi Literature* the genre is called “‘hard core criminal’ that is to say, porn movies with real crimes [my translation]” (Bolaño, *Nazi Literature* 195). This time the context of the aberration is the military repression in Chile during Augusto Pinochet’s government. As for the Mexican femicides, even though nothing has yet been proven, the type of violence inflicted on the victims has led the investigators in Ciudad Juárez to contemplate a connection between the snuff film industry and the brutal murders. By suggesting this possibility, the author opens a new can of worms in an already ugly scenario: raping, mutilating, and killing disposable third-world women in a Mexican “set” to be sold and consumed by anonymous DVD viewers who can pay for those illegal and expensive movies from a safe distance anywhere in the world.

All in all, until the final page of Part Four (which ends with the last killing of 1997), one female corpse after another appears raped and dismembered. Looking for female victims’ agency

in this section thus becomes a losing battle. Presenting an even more extreme depiction of trafficked women's powerlessness than the narratives analyzed so far, readers cannot find heroines here among those murdered, a reminder that reality sometimes forecloses Western audiences' expectations of encountering third-world women who overcome their victimhood to evolve into hopeful survivors. While it would be a mistake to lump together all third-world women's experiences under the same umbrella of oppression--which Chandra Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal, and Caren Kaplan forcefully warn against--in this particular novel, the serial nature of the maquiladora workers' abductions, rapes, and murders epitomize an acute case of patriarchal and economic exploitation, where third-world women are mercilessly utilized and disposed of by global capitalism. One could propose that the existing economic system is sick (with millions of third-world women working under variable degrees of exploitation) and that, if untreated (not regulated by strong democratic governments and dependent instead on world finance institutions), it can (it does) lead to death.⁹¹

6.2 Theorizing Third-world Women in the Neocolonial Context: "A sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world"

In *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Melissa Wright contends that the typical third-world female maquiladora worker, paradoxically, "generates widespread prosperity through her own destruction" (2). And even though those of us in the global North are connected to these women through the product of their exploitative labor, many only become

⁹¹ It is worth mentioning the similar type of exploitation has occurred in Asia, where multinational company such as Apple has had to respond to inquiries about the suicide of an increasing number of its workers because of the company's appalling demands on them. See Chamberlain and Moore covering the news for *The Guardian*, and Charles Duhigg and Keith Bradsher for the *New York Times*.

aware of their abject existence through reading a novel about their outrageous deaths.⁹² More uncomfortably, through the portrayal of these third-world women's femicides, readers cannot escape the reality that bourgeois privileges in the global north (most of the women killed worked for maquiladoras that assemble cars, household appliances, spa products, etc.) are built upon the literal sacrifice of a disposable female workforce.

In this novel, patriarchy combines with class and race, delineating an invisible barrier between those who can be preyed upon and those preserved untouched. By providing emotionally removed representations of the victims (sharing only anthropological/socioeconomic details), readers are constantly reminded that these women's utter poverty and degree of pigmentation play a crucial role in their horrible fates. Part Two, for instance, gives readers a glimpse of a domestic scene where the worried father of a young girl (Professor Amalfitano) expresses his concerns regarding his daughter and the violence occurring in Santa Teresa, only to be reassured by a friend who reminds him of their privileged middle-class position:

That night, as Rosa [Amalfitano's young daughter] watched a movie she'd rented, Amalfitano called Professor Perez and confessed that he was turning into a nervous wreck. Professor Perez soothed him, told him not to worry so much, all you had to do is be careful, there was no point in giving in to paranoia. She

⁹² While governments and the police have been notorious for their lack of effective action, several well-known artists have taken it upon themselves to bring attention to the situation. Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos explains that a "particular culture has emerged around the crimes of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua constituted by how what has happened is addressed, and also by literary and poetic, pictorial, sculptural, musical, photographic, theatrical, filmic, and artistic creations" (xii). Bolaño is not the only author who has addressed the femicides through writing, although in literature he is probably the most prominent contemporary figure. Other artists include Chilean poet Marjorie Agosín, who published a book of poems in 2006; singers Alejandro Sanz, Alex Ubago, and Manu Chao, among other figures, gave a concert to raise awareness about these cases in 2005; actors Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas starred in a movie about these crimes in 2006; singer Tori Amos released a song about the murders of Juárez in 1999; actress Jane Fonda became involved in the cause in 2004—and these are only some public figures among the many other artists and journalists who have campaigned to bring justice to the women of Ciudad Juárez.

reminded him that the victims were usually kidnapped in *other* parts of the city [my emphasis]. (Bolaño 198-9)

Those “other” parts of the city are the pauperized slums where the majority of maquiladora workers live. Their appalling precariousness even scares the FBI agent (Albert Kessler) hired by the Mexican government to help with the investigation.⁹³ Kessler, “always in a police car escorted by another police car,” drives through the neighborhoods “where the snatchings most often took place,” later commenting to the press: “Walking the streets in broad daylight [. . .] is frightening. I mean: frightening for a man like me. The reporters, none of whom lived in those neighborhoods, nodded. The officers, however, hid smiles” (605). In a bout of shortsightedness, however, Kessler further adds: “For a woman, [. . .] it is dangerous to be out at night. Reckless. Most of the streets, except for the main thoroughfares with bus routes, are poorly lit or not lit at all” (605). Clearly, something is rotten in Santa Teresa, yet, for these women, going out at night is not a matter of choice when their shifts at the maquiladoras demand that they walk deserted areas for miles at, say, four in the morning to begin their workday. That the FBI agent calls them “reckless” only showcases his chauvinism: perhaps if the police enforced a curfew on men as a means to control the crimes, women would be able to walk safely to the assembly plants (of course, in the context of 2666, this alternative sounds naively utopian—a valid subject for Latin American magic realism).

Which brings us to the maquiladora industry: in Part Four, Bolaño does not spare opportunities to allude to them and their possible link to the crimes. Their descriptions look nothing less than sinister. A female victim, Maria de la Luz Romero “had just started working at EMSA, one of the oldest maquiladoras in Santa Teresa, which [resembled] a melon-colored

⁹³ From his correspondence with Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez, Bolaño understood that the hiring of an FBI agent who didn’t even speak Spanish was a political move, more than a genuine act of concern for those women murdered.

pyramid, its sacrificial altar hidden behind smokestacks and two enormous hangar doors through which workers and trucks entered” (450). Even though the plants offer a modern environment in stark contrast with the workers’ homes (clean, air-conditioned, with indoor sanitary facilities, cafeterias, etc.), the work demanded is considered so exploitative that only the most marginalized sectors seek for jobs there, and these industries never offer any possibility of continuity or promotion (unless, as Melissa Wright analyzes, the worker is a man who can then train for a managerial post).

In fact, it has become “institutionalized” that these assembly plants rely on a “disposable” female population that must perform highly technical and specific work—monotonous but difficult—keeping the production line moving twenty-four hours a day. Melissa Wright notes that the typical maquiladora worker has a productive life of about five years; after that, she is usually disposed of because by then her body has lost dexterity and her value has diminished. Plant managers explain that to keep a maquiladora worker longer would translate into losses (the same goes for firing them before the five-year deadline, as the time invested in their training has not been amortized). The result is a constant turnover of workers who “are hired and fired at will” (Marx 9).

Bolaño alludes to this phenomenon openly. At the maquiladora “EastWest,” for example, an employee’s file “had been lost, which wasn’t uncommon at the maquiladoras, since workers were constantly coming and going” (Bolaño 414). As for the workers’ shifts, they follow “no set pattern and obeyed production schedules beyond the workers’ comprehension” (469). Ruled by the market dictum of supply and demand, the plants’ goal is to constantly expel the finished product. This social hieroglyphic hides the exploitative human labor in the object assembled and transforms it into a fetish ready to be exchanged and consumed by those with the power to

purchase it anywhere in the global north, while the worn-out mantra that “at least these plants offer third-world women jobs” assuages Western consciences and obliterates any consciousness of complicity.

Yolanda Palacios, the only officer in charge of the Department of Sex Crimes, explains to the journalist Sergio Gonzalez the “blessings” maquiladoras have poured over Santa Teresa:

Do you know which Mexican city has the lowest unemployment rate? Sergio Gonzalez [asked:] Santa Teresa? [. . .] That’s right, Santa Teresa, said the head of the Department of Sex Crimes. Here almost all the women have work. Badly paid and exploitative work, with ridiculous hours and no union protections, but work, after all, which is a blessing for so many women from Oaxaca or Zacatecas. [. . .] So there’s no female unemployment? he asked. Don’t be an asshole, said Yolanda Palacio, of course there’s unemployment, female and male; it’s just that the rate of female unemployment is much lower than in the rest of the country. (568-9)

That these plants necessitate female exploitation to prosper is no secret, and here we see the complicity of the national government in condoning such exploitation. Pressured by the IMF, national governments readily acquiesce to laws that grant transnational corporations (whose only interest is, of course, profit) power to determine salaries, work hours, and working conditions in the host country that would certainly outrage workers in the headquarters at home. Repeatedly, the narrator recounts stories of employees “fired for trying to organize a union,” suggesting that exploitation is the rule, and those who aspire to more dignified working conditions have no place in these plants (412). Bolaño’s carefully researched novel draws this connection between the maquiladoras and the crimes quite clearly. Not coincidentally, the feminist anthropologist Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos emphasizes that the chosen femicide victims are poor, dark-

skinned, young, and “many of them worked in the maquilas” (qtd. in Fregoso, *Terrorizing Women* xv).

In *2666*, readers do not witness any murder, yet Bolaño’s decision to show the aftermath of the violence through countless repetition proves to be a powerful alternative. The authors previously analyzed in this work tell the story of one female protagonist who bears witness for the tortures endured by the rest. In keeping with the real-life scenario, in *2666*, the Chilean writer does not allow the female victims to claim moments of agency while still alive or struggling for their lives, bringing attention to those vulnerable populations that otherwise would not receive much attention. One only has to think of the relatively modest action the US-Mexican border femicides have sparked nationally and internationally (despite the appalling number of victims) in order to understand the degree of apathy towards “disposable” subaltern women today. In “The Impossible Closing: Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in Bolaño’s *2666*,” Grant Farred observes:

Writing neoliberalism, Bolaño’s work insists that if the postcolonial will not speak directly, (un)ethically, its relation to the neoliberal, then all that there is left to do is to dramatize, in a horrible fashion [. . .] the constitutive presence of death in the everyday functioning of the maquiladoras. Death, moreover, not as metaphoric or symbolic, but as a brutal, inexplicable, fact of the neoliberal postcolonial state: the death of the maquiladora women derives its political effect from its unremarkable, and therefore consequential, regularity (693).

As a stylistic choice, the author emphasizes the quantity of murders more than the quality of the violence (which is present, but not experienced). Unlike Park, Mahasweta, Darko, and Abani, who attempt to represent trauma through an empathetic look at the protagonist from her

perspective, Bolaño offers a distant gaze that leads audiences to empathize through understanding the shocking number of femicides, the impunity killers enjoy, and the apathy of society in general. Readers in turn are invited to question such willful ignorance, when we know that these women sustain the world economy from behind the scenes at their own expense. And while the corpses represented intentionally horrify, they place the abject within our globalized culture under a necessary spotlight.

Along with the female corpses that cyclically emerge brutally violated in the desert, then, readers are reminded once again of the limits of theory. Let us think, for example, of the subversive power Homi Bhabha finds in the “hybrid” identity of the subaltern, a premise that so brilliantly explained the colonizer/colonized relation during the territorial colonization of India, but one that cannot account for the powerlessness of the victims of rape and slaughtering in Santa Teresa. Instead of destabilizing the system, these women’s deaths actually seem to invigorate it. Time and again, Bolaño’s novel shows that these femicides have been deliberately downplayed by the police and the government, so when by the end of the novel no credibly responsible person is behind bars, readers cannot miss the alarming degree of indifference towards those victimized at the lowest strata of society.

In Part Five, for example, Benno von Archimboldi’s German nephew (Klaus Hass) becomes a scapegoat opportunely imprisoned by the Mexican police to quiet protestors, but his incarceration emphasizes the atmosphere of utter corruption and impunity of Santa Teresa. The fact that during his stay behind bars women keep showing up dead becomes another (tasteless) joke of the police. In the novel, Haas represents Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif, the Egyptian engineer accused of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez. The journalist Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez’s *Huesos en el Desierto* (his investigation of the murders, available only in Spanish) suggests that Sharif’s

foreignness and his previous rape charges in the US turned him into the perfect serial killer for the Mexican police and the media. Although Gonzalez Rodriguez initially considered the possibility of Sharif's guilt, the more he dirtied his hands digging into the cases, the more "his reporting began to suggest that the policemen, government officials and drug traffickers of Juárez were all connected to one another, and to the femicides" (Valdes 25). Bolaño takes this idea and, instead of an orientalized Egyptian "villain," he gives us a German one. Archimboldi's nephew's nationality also serves the purpose of introducing the background of World War II, as we learn in Part Five that Archimboldi has fought during the war (completely uninterested in the violence and only killing one German who committed an abuse) and later decides to become a writer. In this way, the human capacity for unbound evil continues to star as the main protagonist of Bolaño novel. The Germans Haas and Archimboldi then serve as a link between the atrocities committed during the war in Europe and the femicides in Mexico. The novel finishes with Archimboldi on his way to Santa Teresa to help his nephew get out of prison: an open-ended conclusion in keeping with an open-ended reality.

In the voice of a clairvoyant (Florita Almada) who acts like the only moral compass in "The Part about the Crimes," in Santa Teresa reigns "[s]uch a terrible apathy and such a terrible darkness" (437), but no Yeatsian "terrible beauty" is ever born here. Instead, the femicides are handled with such impunity and calculated silencing by the patriarchal Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses (to borrow Althusser's terminology) that these deaths only highlight hierarchical power structures more emphatically and in turn seem to affirm that the rights of elites with their economic interests prevail. Arguably, when the poor in their most insignificant version (racialized women) do not have access to justice--when justice isn't *blind*—what is left for them?

Early in the 1960s, in his postcolonial landmark *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon predicted that class, more than race, would perpetuate the oppression typical of the colonial situation. In Fanon's view, local elites that had absorbed imperial attitudes would continue to exploit the lower classes just like France used to do in Algeria or England in India before World War II. Immersed in the current global economic context, Anne McClintock takes a similar stand when she poses a question about the accuracy of the term "postcolonial," as she observes that

[s]ince the 1940s, the U.S.' imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed. The power of U.S. finance capital and huge multinational corporations to command the flows of capital, research, consumer goods and media information around the world can exert a coercive power as great as any colonial gunboat. It is precisely the greater subtlety, innovation and variety of these forms of imperialism that make the historical rupture implied by the term postcolonial especially unwarranted. (*Imperial Leather* 13)

Like Grewal and Kaplan in *Scattered Hegemonies* (1994), McClintock contests the binary notions of "colonizer-colonized, self-other, dominance-resistance, metropolis-colony, colonial-postcolonial" because in the current deregulated global framework they do not reflect a much more porous reality, where we can find the first world within the third world and vice versa (*Imperial Leather* 15)--in fact, the world's known richest man, as of today, is Mexican. In such a context, McClintock points out: "I argue that [. . .] gender is not synonymous with women. [. . .] I argue that feminism is as much about class, race, work and money as it is about sex" (7). Novels like the ones under analysis then demand fresh approaches to theorizing the female

postcolonial, as issues of individual agency and sexual expression, so celebrated by European and American feminist theory, become clearly complicated.

Above all, these third-world women here represented share an inherent disposability. As Melissa Wright observes, “when workers are determined to be worthless or when women’s corpses are dumped like trash in the desert, these discourses explain how, given these women’s ‘intrinsic worthlessness,’ such events are both natural and unavoidable” (18). Yet the tacit questions this novel articulates still remain: what ideological mechanisms become activated in order to take as “natural” (that is, not a subject of interrogation) the fact that a woman assembling a component in Mexico deserves an infinitesimal portion of what she would receive had she assembled the same component across the border in the US? Who benefits from this “natural” rule? Why is there such apathy regarding these third-world women’s plights? More alarmingly, *2666* showcases a truly disturbing side of exploitation as the majority of the victims of serial abduction, rape, and murder work at the maquiladoras that cater to the global north’s consumerist needs. In this respect, Anne McClintock accurately contends that “it is at the crossroads of contradictions that strategies for change may best be found” (*Imperial Leather* 15). Though bluntly, Bolaño’s *2666* highlights such contradictions and opens the possibility of an inquisitive dialogue.

6.3 Conclusion

Under men’s reluctant eyes, the past few decades have witnessed the migratory phenomenon of an increasing number of women desperately looking for a means of sustenance for themselves and often families left back home. Because of global capitalism’s pervasiveness, women now constitute the bulk of the workforce worldwide, so this trend has forced neo-

conservative patriarchal societies to rethink gender roles and the family as women increasingly challenge men's privileged position of sole economic providers. Within this work frame, women are displacing traditional male subjects who allegedly cannot compete with their "dexterity," "docility," "patience," "attentiveness," and "cheapness" (Wright 25). But despite the need for these third-world women to sustain the economic world engine, their situation remains deplorable.

Like history repeating itself, here comes to mind Simone de Beauvoir's seminal *The Second Sex* (1949), where the feminist critic makes a similar point about the newly acquired female emancipation during the industrial revolution and its impact on patriarchal societies:

One of the consequences of the industrial revolution was the entrance of women into productive labor [. . .] Although landed property lost power to some extent, the bourgeoisie clung to the old morality that found the guarantee of private property in the solidity of the family. Woman was ordered back into the home more harshly as her emancipation became a real menace. Even within the working class the men endeavored to restrain woman's liberation, because they begun to see the women as dangerous competitors—the more so because they were accustomed to work for lower wages. (154)

Leaving aside for a moment the obvious class and race difference stemming from de Beauvoir's claim, this example becomes worth revisiting since after so many years of feminist struggles, it suggests that despite some of the positive changes achieved by the twenty-first century, to different (often masked) degrees, patriarchy remains endemic. In fact, all the narratives analyzed throughout this work reveal that patriarchy still plays a prominent role in the exploitation of subaltern women: Eveline could have become a trafficked prostitute because, at the turn of the

century, her inferior status as a woman offered her scant opportunities beyond working at the stores for a meager salary. But as time progresses towards the end of the century, the situation of those colonial and postcolonial women caught in the lowest strata of society deteriorates beyond their unequal relation of competition with men in the job market as analyzed by de Beauvoir, to reveal extreme cases of exploitation and sexual violence, often institutionalized. Soon-ha was regarded a commodified human “toilet,” just like Douloti, Mara, Abigail, and the countless femicide victims whose horrific ends resist aesthetic symbolization. Because of their subaltern status within the current patriarchal world economy, these women now share a “natural” disposability, which Bolaño forces readers to confront, one dismembered female corpse at a time.

In a disturbing turn, however, the appalling situation Bolaño describes at the core of *2666* has changed during the past ten years--for the worse. Mexican maquiladoras enjoyed their heyday between 1993 and 2003 but, as of now, many of the assembly plants have left Mexico, partly because of the drug wars and partly because of more capital-friendly trade agreements between the US and Asia. There, maquiladoras found women more “willing” to work for even less money and under more exploitative practices.⁹⁴ Some assembly plants, for example, have creatively solved the taxation/national borders issue by basing their operations in huge factory ships in the middle of the ocean, where no levies can apply and maximum profit can be extracted out of the employees working for them. As a result, Ciudad Juárez now bears the empty

⁹⁴ With the economic world crisis sparked in August 2011, this situation may change once again. China’s economy has gotten stronger because of the devaluation of the US dollar, which has translated into higher salaries for Chinese workers. This, in turn, will probably “benefit” Mexico since plants could be relocated once again to Latin America as Mexican salaries can be kept below current Chinese standards and transportation costs would be greatly reduced (see Oppenheimer’s “Oportunidad Mexicana” in *El País* and “Mexico’s Economy: Making the Desert Bloom in *The Economist*).

skeletons of those abandoned factories and those abandoned women, while the drug wars between Mexican cartels have turned it into the most dangerous city in the world.

In *Roberto Bolaño: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, Marcela Valdes explains that in 2666 the author intended “to write a postmortem for the dead of the past, the present and the future” (15). Were Bolaño still alive now, he might have felt disappointed (but probably not surprised) to learn that the femicides have been relegated to the shadows as the more prominent male drug-related murders have gained central stage in Mexico and the international media, proving once again that only some victims (like the Central Park jogger) deserve attention and action. The fate of the young women of Juarez—who will likely continue to appear raped, mutilated, and abandoned in the desert--have become “secrets in the sand,” to borrow the Chilean poet Marjorie Agosín’s book title honoring them. Right now, on the US-Mexican border, the pressing topic is drug traffic, not sex traffic. But throughout its almost nine hundred pages, Bolaño’s novel seems to whisper in his audiences’ ears: have the lives and deaths of these disposable women *ever* been a pressing topic?

7 Conclusion

As I begin to write this concluding chapter, the situation of the now former International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, saturates the news: on May 14, 2011, his alleged rape of a Guinean maid in a luxurious New York hotel put a (temporary) question mark to his moral standing and hampered his promising career as the future president of France; predictably, a list of past patriarchal sins have come to light revealing that his illicit sexual incursions have remained hidden from public opinion--and forgiven by influential political elites aware of the peccadilloes. An army of powerful lawyers was mobilized with the intention of proving that Strauss-Kahn did not “rape” the maid, that the sex was consensual.⁹⁵ DSK was finally acquitted of all charges, yet, in an impossible-to-miss double entendre (or plain Freudian slip), one of his lawyers informed the press that the former IMF chief handled his “horrific nightmare” with “class” (Rushe). The semantics of coincidence, perhaps, but this example suitably closes this analysis as we pose the same question on a global level: has the IMF metaphorically “raped” the third world--and consequently enabled the very real rape of subaltern trafficked women? If not quite, how “consensual” is the sex are having?

As analyzed throughout, trafficking-consuming-discarding subaltern female bodies has become a symptomatic byproduct of the current global economic situation. Now, with the

⁹⁵ On May 15, 2011, the *Guardian* reported: “New York police spokesman Paul Browne detailed the allegedly brutal attack on a woman at the Sofitel New York on West 44th Street in the heart of the theatre district, where Strauss-Kahn was staying in a \$3,000 (£1,850) a night suite” (Chrisafis). The thirty-two-year-old alleged victim told the police that “she entered Strauss-Kahn’s room at about 1pm. Browne said: ‘She told detectives he came out of the bathroom naked, ran down a hallway to the foyer where she was, pulled her into a bedroom and began to sexually assault her, according to her account. She pulled away from him and he dragged her down a hallway into the bathroom where he engaged in a criminal sexual act, according to her account to detectives. He tried to lock her into the hotel room’” (Chrisafis). In what was felt by many as a legal manipulation to discredit the alleged victim of rape, the credibility of the maid was put into question by invoking circumstances unrelated to the alleged rape, so the charges against DSK were finally dropped. In a separate incident, it was reported on February 21, 2012 that “Strauss-Kahn is now being questioned by the French police for his alleged involvement in a prostitution ring [in Europe]” (“Former IMF Chief Held, Questioned in Prostitution Inquiry”).

blessing of the free market and the help of legitimized institutions, Western developed nations continue to draw wealth from third-world countries just like they did during their territorial colonization. Through the guise of transnational corporations linked to local governments and their militaries, finance capital today exercises global economic hegemony.⁹⁶ Incidentally, as J. K. Gibson-Graham explains, these corporations have little “transnational” in them, since chief investors remain primarily in countries in the global North, such as West Germany, the UK, the US, and a few others scattered in third-world states acting as service agents for them (127).⁹⁷ As best illustrated in the works analyzed in Chapter Four (Mahasweta Devi) and Chapter Six (Roberto Bolaño), with the sanction of local governments, global corporations not only disrupt native environments by extracting natural resources at the outrageously low prices dictated by the market, but also actively participate (by action or omission) in the criminal exploitation of those who have lost access to mere survival in their own village/town/city/country because of the economic measures imposed by regulatory institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF.

In “The Global Dispensation Since 1945,” Neil Lazarus lucidly explains the economic trajectory postcolonial countries followed after decolonization, highlighting that financial institutions imposed structural adjustment plans on third-world nations in exchange for credit to “develop” with disastrous consequences for the newly independent societies (19). Emergent nations were forced to privatize their industries, deregulate labor, and compete in an unbounded free market. But such model was never applied uniformly, as countries in the global North have maintained throughout some degree of protectionism towards their industries in order to preserve

⁹⁶ In *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996), J.K. Gibson-Graham offer concrete strategies to de-center capitalism’s perceived economic hegemony.

⁹⁷ Transnational corporations are more likely to establish manufacturing plants in countries with weak or corrupt governments, more likely to engage their military in case of worker strikes, demonstrations, etc. See Enloe’s *Globalization and Militarism* (2007).

their own economies. Chomsky argues that “in fact, [this is] how every country in the world that [has] developed has done it: by imposing high levels of protectionism, and by extricating its economy from free market discipline. And that [is] precisely what the Western powers have been preventing the rest of the Third World from doing, right up to this moment” (66). Thus, there is a link between the glaringly unequal current economic context and sex trafficked women, which I have tried to illuminate through the different postcolonial narratives of sexual slavery explored in this work.

The situation of the majority of the world population living in dire poverty and forced to accept degrading working conditions in order to survive is unfortunately no news— what would be considered “subhuman” sweatshop labor if openly seen in the US, for example, late capitalist ideology has normalized in the so-called third world.⁹⁸ As Žižek would explain, there is no ideology as “false consciousness” anymore: we are well aware that third-world exploitation exists and that we are connected to it, but we respond with apathy. The literature under analysis shows that, within this boundless profit-seeking system, women remain what Gayatri Spivak calls “the last instance” in the chain of super-exploitation (“Woman in Difference” 82). Coerced sex trafficking only adds a deeper layer of complexity because, for those caught in it, escape is an unlikely option, while their trafficking often becomes a literal death sentence.

Because of the ominous projections about the spread and increase of this crime, Marjorie Stone has observed that sex trafficking “in its more extreme forms is the slave trade of the twenty-first century and arguably the greatest human rights challenge we may now face” (33). But, as mentioned in the introduction, the issue has provoked markedly diverse reactions and interpretations, especially in academia. To this day, feminists remain divided between those

⁹⁸ I am not implying that exploitation of this kind does not occur in the US.

either critical or supportive of sex work (although the latter group differentiates between forced and voluntary prostitution--and even this distinction becomes difficult, sometimes impossible, to make). As Stone objects, lack of agreement on a topic so tightly connected to sexual slavery predictably weakens subsequent action to stop the cycle and help the populations affected. Despite the urgency of the problem, Stone denounces the fact that North American and European feminisms have ignored the issue because these schools have privileged aspects of female individuality, empowerment, and celebratory sexuality to the detriment of subaltern trafficked women who do not fit those paradigms. Stone refers to Teresa L. Ebert's *Ludic Feminism and After* (1996), where Ebert claims that "postmodern feminisms have focused on theories of desire, performativity, linguistic play, difference, and discourse to the relative exclusion of theories and analyses of class, capitalism, oppression, and 'patriarchy'" (35). Quoting Ebert, Stone further adds that "that the playful 'indeterminacy' ludic feminism 'posits as a mark of resistance' is, 'in actuality, a legitimization of the class politics of an upper-middle class Euroamerican feminism obsessed with the freedom of the entrepreneurial subject'" (35).

Criticism such as Stone's and Ebert's highlights theoretical gaps and tensions that the postcolonial novels in this study showcase in all crudity: the link, for example, between women in the global North and those in the global South through the product of the latter's exploitative labor, as most evidently observed in Bolaño's *2666*. As Spivak has analyzed in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," just as Bertha Mason perishes so that Jane Eyre can become the Victorian feminist heroine of the genre (in Spivak's words, "a cult text of feminism"), superexploited subaltern women today are perishing so that their first-world sisters can enjoy the fruits of their emancipation (362).

At the same time, I agree with Grewal and Kaplan's call to acknowledge the distinct subjectivities of "third-world" women's realities, the "imperative need to address the concerns of women around the world in the historicized particularity of their relationship to multiple patriarchies as well as to international economic hegemonies" (17). These critics stress the importance of articulating "the relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination, and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels" (17). The stories in this study are woven together by the thread of sex trafficking, but the multiplicity of the contexts enabling the crime shows that we cannot construct postcolonial trafficked women as a transparent group ready for academic appropriation.

In this respect, the diverse scenarios in which sex trafficking occurs, the different nuances of the crime, and their intricacies demand separate clarification. One must acknowledge that the highly emotional content of this appalling reality has led to all kinds of manipulations, especially in terms of the actual figures of victims/survivors: assessment of "victimhood" status deserving of help to certain populations and not others, arbitrary decisions in terms of anti-trafficking funding allocation, or subjective legislation to deal with those affected by sex trafficking. In "Distortions and Difficulties in Data for Trafficking," Bebe Loff and Jyoti Sanghera note that "accurate data on trafficking in all its forms are difficult to obtain [and that such] data, as exist, are often contaminated with ideological and moral bias" (566). The researchers explain that

[e]motive factors, used effectively since the days of the white slave trade campaigns, make funding easier to obtain for research on trafficking than for the full range of circumstances that exist for migrant workers. Laura Agustin D'Andrea makes the point that researchers wanting to study migrant sex workers

find funding difficult to obtain for work outside the themes of trafficking, HIV/AIDS, or violence against women. She attempts to show how working only within these frameworks distorts the multiplicity of realities that exist for women and the ranges of responses that might be offered to them. (566)

Even though this work has concentrated only on representations of forced prostitution, sex trafficking brings to the fore and complicates issues of agency, since, clearly, not all trafficked women are coerced. As Loff and Sanghera point out, “[t]rafficking is the result, in part, of actions by ‘victims’ who sensibly seek a better life [and therefore become agents] for themselves and their families in another country. It is also a response to needs in the labour market in countries of destination” (566). From this perspective, “[d]iscussions about trafficking should be considered against a backdrop of global inequality in which people make rational decisions to act in ways that might be illegal, socially unacceptable, or self harming” (566). By having focused on those women coerced into sex trafficking, then, I do not intend to downplay the situation of the millions of women who regularly choose to be trafficked because this analysis understands and validates that it is global capitalism in its current form that leads them to take such risks. The population addressed here (forced sex slaves) simply remains a step below in an appalling chain of super-exploitation.

To analyze each story in its geopolitical, historical, and cultural specificity becomes a challenge, as this volume shows that trafficked women do not constitute a coherent group. Eveline’s situation obviously differs from that of Soon-ah’s, Douloti’s, Mara’s, or Abigail’s--the particulars of the crime vary according to the different transnational contexts. Indeed, the local is felt in all these globalized stories. In Chapter Two, we see how James Joyce’s “Eveline” incorporates discourses of migration and white slavery exclusive of turn-of-the-century Ireland,

when populations were fleeing because of poverty and lack of opportunities. In Chapter Three, through the analysis of Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*, readers understand that sex trafficking became intertwined with the distinct colonial relationship between Japan and Korea, the hyper-patriarchal structure of the Japanese army (although Enloe raises questions about the patriarchy of the military in general), and the Korean adherence to Confucianism. In Chapter Four, Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful" addresses sex trafficking through the Indian caste system and the endemic persistence of bonded slavery, all in a context worsened by politics of development facilitated by the IMF's structural adjustment plans and the national government's indifference to the poor after decolonization. In Chapter Five, Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* hints that sex trafficking is enabled by culturally accepted norms that regard women as the property of their fathers or husbands, while, like Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, she indicts her native society by exposing the pressures exercised by those who stay in Africa and expect the "been-to's" success in Europe at any cost. Darko also refers to local superstitions that procurers utilize to scare trafficked women into compliance and obedience (recent sociological data confirms that women trafficked from African countries--nowadays especially into Greece--are terrorized through traditional rituals, a particularly "local" way of keeping them oppressed). In Chapter Six, Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, unabashedly shows the vulnerability of those indigenous-looking women who live in the utter poverty of the Mexican border region, the blatant chauvinism reigning in the society, and the vampirism of the economic system thriving after NAFTA through transnational corporations and their maquiladoras.

Yet despite the distinct culturally bound scenarios, we can still establish some helpful general parameters. In truth, the reality of sex trafficking is so appalling that to transcribe it into language becomes a challenge for any socially responsible writer who does not want to fetishize

a tortured and raped body just to sell books (and, in so doing, commodify the women once again). But the topic can be represented. As analyzed throughout, the different postcolonial sex trafficking stories share some features: the authors tend to describe the rapes from the point of view of the victim/survivor; they often efface the depiction of actual sexual aggression from the text; when present, the sexually violent scenes are relatively few in the context of the whole narrative; the authors address the victims' vulnerability primarily in terms of their socioeconomic circumstances, their dependence on patriarchal structures, and their ethnicity (class, gender, and race); above all, they show how state-sanctioned institutions play a crucial role in enabling these women's exploitation. Indeed, this work illustrates the way in which, in its different variants, sex trafficking relies on violence against women enabled by resilient patriarchal economic systems acting through legitimized institutions worldwide.

Eveline may have avoided a fate of sexual slavery by not boarding the ship at the North Wall, but the rest of the stories examined show that women die (Douloti), commit suicide (Abigail), are murdered (poor, racialized women in Santa Teresa), end up trapped in an ominous chosen life of prostitution and drugs (Mara), or learn through a minor character about the execution of the majority of the other sex slaves (Soon-ah). Without intending to theorize third-world women as a monolithic group deprived of power, the postcolonial narratives explored in the previous chapters converge in that they describe one form of subaltern female exploitation taken to the extreme. Clearly, these women's agency is limited to unattainable positive choices: the sex slaves' options remain between submission, torture, or death. What all these stories in their heterogeneous cultural contexts share is a representation of the magnitude and crudity of sex trafficking as the symptom of capitalism left unchecked/unrestricted/unrestrained, where the most vulnerable populations are clandestinely demanded/consumed/disposed of, by product of

ideology, “naturally.” Transnational sex trafficking thus becomes a symptom of a patriarchal neoliberal system in need of a drastic ethical overhaul.

As the progression of the narratives explored has shown, the effects of transnational sex trafficking have been felt since the beginning of the twentieth century, but the problem has worsened during the past three decades with the strengthening of global capitalism. From the literature analyzed, readers perceive that this system, if left unquestioned, in its most extreme form will continue to draw life from the death of these vulnerable populations. The alarming indifference towards these subaltern women invites reflection: as epitomized in Bolaño’s novel, not even the corpses of more than five hundred women have managed to speak back to the latest financial “empire.” Instead, these stories reflect how the status quo remains undisturbed because of the perceived systemic “worthlessness” of these women and the profits that legitimized institutions obtain, by action or omission, from their abject existence. Class, above all, determines these postcolonial trafficked women’s (in)visibility.

Ultimately, this analysis begs the question: what does our knowing about the discourse of sexual trafficking accomplish for those postcolonial women caught in it? As Edward Said writes in the preface to *Orientalism* (1979), “there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples [. . .] that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation” (xix). In other words, Said posits the danger of victimizing the Other even more if we regard their oppression from the distant perspective of a benevolent Western hegemony that reminds us every day that “freedom” and “justice” exist predominantly in the West, while obliterating any responsibility.

Spivak warns Western critics of an attitude of paralysis where they assume that they cannot speak for the subaltern “retaining their specificity, their difference, while not giving up [their] own” (*The Postcolonial Critic* 9). “How, then,” Spivak wonders,

can one learn from and speak to the millions of illiterate rural and urban [. . .] women who live “in the pores of” capitalism, inaccessible to capitalist dynamics that allow us our shared channels of communication, the definition of common enemies? The pioneering books that bring First World feminists news from the Third World are written by privileged informants and can only be deciphered by a trained readership[.] This is not tied to the tired nationalist claim that only a native can know the scene. The point that I am trying to make is that, in order to learn about the Third World women and develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman*. (*In Other Worlds* 135-6)

Instead, Spivak proposes “un-learning our privilege as our loss [so that it does not] come through benevolence” that would maintain Western power structures intact. Spivak contends that “[w]e will not be able to speak to women out there if we depend completely on conferences and anthologies by Western trained informants” (*The Postcolonial Critic* 9). The critic highlights the importance of analyzing subaltern female exploitation as organic intellectuals with an empathetic look at these women’s experiences and their genuine interest in mind. Sharing a hopeful view of the power of the humanities, Spivak suggests that literature and philosophy can become invaluable tools for the un-coercive re-arrangement of our desire, offering the possibility of reading, imagining, and reformulating the world from an ethical perspective in which effective

social change becomes possible (“Gayatri Spivak: Reading Literature and Philosophy Globally”).

Through the works explored here, then, we can reflect upon our objective when we read or teach these narratives and evaluate the efficacy of sex trafficking stories in terms of possible social action beyond the literature class. Do they generate any material positive change, or, as Said warns against, do they reinforce Western supremacy and thus normalize the exploitation? By analyzing the audience and purpose of these texts, we can also question postcolonial theory itself, the degree to which it can generate the productive knowledge Said mentions and Spivak calls transnational literacy, rather than encapsulating postcolonial realities in a neat field of study that runs the risk of becoming irrelevant to the lives of the people it wishes to help.

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said notes “that even the most radical theoretical or critical moves can become a ‘trap’ if endlessly, emptily repeated” (qtd. in Bartolovich 117). If we think of postcolonial theory in its most postmodern/poststructuralist versions as criticized by Benita Parry and Peter Hallward, for example, we may interrogate its effectiveness or application in mitigating the realities of these trafficked postcolonial women today. Readers may question how subversive this discourse actually is in the face of a much more diffused “colonizer,” such as global finance capital in the twenty-first century.⁹⁹ In societies where the prevalent ideology is that of cynicism, as Žižek has put it, we can rightfully wonder whether learning about trafficked women’s situation improves in any way their circumstances. The world now knows that the “comfort women” were young girls kidnapped and raped by the Japanese military, but they still haven’t been officially acknowledged and compensated by their government; it has been widely reported that India has turned into one of

⁹⁹ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000).

the most dangerous countries for poor women to live precisely because of sex trafficking, but these slaves fulfill a role within the local economy that the government is not ready to admit or give up; anti-trafficking groups persistently inform the public that the situation of trafficked women in European brothels is out of control, but the victims/survivors are still treated as prostitutes and illegal immigrants deserving incarceration and deportation; we know that working-class, female populations are being super-exploited, especially in Latin America and Asia, but we still need their cheap labor for the commodities the assembly plants produce. The stories analyzed suggest that it is not lack of information that keeps the sex trafficking engine running.

Of course, postcolonial theory has offered invaluable tools for resistance: theory can and does translate into material practice. Undeniably, what towering figures like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have contributed to the field is immense. Fanon challenged imperial regimes and advocated anti-colonial struggle through violence, if necessary. Said demonstrated that Western interpretations of the Other are rooted in the West's own projections, fears, and desires, which constituted the cultural discourse necessary to accomplish imperialistic undertakings. From a deconstructive, psychoanalytic approach, Homi Bhabha has enlivened fruitful analyses of the Other's subversive power within the ambivalent third space generated when colonizer and colonized meet. But women in particular were absent from those seminal attempts to understand and explain "the postcolonial" as an object of study. In response, Gayatri Spivak has stressed the subaltern woman's voice pointing to the fact that, often, patriarchal hegemonic powers refuse to listen to them. Critics like Chandra Mohanty have reminded us that to look at postcolonial (third-world) women as one monolithic, transparent group is absurd. Today, transnational feminists such as Anne McClintock, Gloria Anzaldúa, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and bell

hooks, among many others, problematize the universalizing of third-world women's experiences and draw attention to the importance of class and the global economy in facilitating their exploitation.¹⁰⁰ In light of these exceptional contributions, the modest aim of this work has been to shed light on the extreme form of exploitation experienced by a particular (but heterogeneous) group of subaltern women who do not—cannot--show agency or subversive power once kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery.

I have analyzed the topic of sex trafficking aesthetically, in literature, but informed by the social sciences and journalism in an effort to bridge academia with “the real world.” Colin MacCabe observes that

it is true that much vanguard research crosses disciplines, but this is written out of the undergraduate and graduate curricula. If, however, the humanities and the social sciences are to get any serious grip on the world, if they are to enable their students to use their studies, then it is imperative that there is a general recasting of the humanities and social sciences. On the one hand students must confront the enormous problems facing the world, on the other they must understand the relation of their own situation to those problems. (xvii)

That is the reason why I have insisted upon reflecting on the structural factors that contribute to the proliferation of sex trafficking, especially through legitimized institutions in which most of us participate in one way or another (if only ideologically). With such purpose, I have at times assumed some strategic essentialism. Admittedly, this literary analysis examines very sad realities, poses more questions than answers, and highlights more problems than solutions. Yet this work hopes to open a dialogue in academia about the super-exploited with the intention of

¹⁰⁰ Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty are transnational feminists as well. I only separated them from the group for the impact of their analyses on the field and because they have inspired several other transnational feminists.

turning apathy or despair into reflection and action, or, as Spivak would say, un-coercively rearrange our desire.

In his editorial column for the January 2012 issue of *PMLA*, opportunely named “This Thing Called Literature . . . What Work Does It Do?”, Simon Gikandi observes: “I am often reminded of the transformative power of literature when I teach classes on extreme forms of social suffering, including genocide, racial violence, and torture”--sex trafficking touches upon all three (19). Gikandi notes that students often see these classes as “opportunities to reflect on the persistence of evil in the modern period[;] some of them are interested in the role of the imagination in negotiating [. . .] unspeakable events; others are curious about the role of language in situations of extreme violence and suffering” (19). I propose that we read these stories in an effort to empathize with the situation of an alarmingly increasing number of third-world trafficked women, and that we reflect upon our social responsibilities as global citizens who can demand and generate solutions. If we know about the existence of sex trafficking, a crime so widespread that some projections foresee that it will soon surpass in magnitude and revenues the drugs and arms trades, we simply cannot remain unconcerned because, depending on where we locate the root cause of the problem (orientalized traffickers versus predatory capitalism), we may move from seeing ourselves as “peripheral” to recognizing our own centrality to the problem (Kristof, *Half* 25).

Perhaps we should start there, then, at the level of our assumptions, and asses our “pedagogical responsibility”--“to ask not merely how literary studies, more correctly the universitarian discipline of English studies, can adjust to changing social demands, but also how we could [begin to transform] some of our assumptions” in order to change the type of “cultural imperialism” usually invoked when addressing ‘third-world’ causes (Spivak, *In Other Worlds*

100). Admittedly, the sex trafficking narratives explored in this work can generate an almost paralyzing sense of defeat because of the horror described and its proportions. And, yet, we can still question some frequent suppositions. First, to imagine the problem as something happening somewhere else, because of evil foreign individuals with no connection to us in the global North misleads and therefore contributes, however unintentionally, to the proliferation of sex trafficking. When present in the narratives, traffickers are represented unsympathetically. These ruthless traffickers exploit, rape, torture, and often murder. But, invariably, these novels reflect a socioeconomic context of poverty and colonial or postcolonial exploitation that generates sex trafficking. Orientalizing traffickers and patronizing slaves, then, occlude the crucial fact that traffickers bring third-world women to the global North because men in more affluent countries are demanding them and paying for their services. As the Japanese doctor in Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor* puts it: "We must educate our [men] first!" (76)--and, as Cynthia Enloe would add, our women, too. Thus, if we view sex trafficking as a reality involving distant third-world Others with no connection to global economic policies benefiting financial capital in the global North, action often translates into providing temporary palliatives in the form of charity and NGO support.

One could argue that the global North desires these women (and thus imports them and consumes them), but expels them from consciousness, turning them into what Kristeva would call "the utmost of abjection" (4). Altruistic institutions such as charities, NGOs, foundations, etc, can become means to channel the libidinal anxieties such tension generates, especially since corporations and governments that participate in these women's exploitation often subsidize those beneficent ventures. True, in the short term, NGOs' and foundations' aid provide much-needed help, but the assistance some of them supply has raised valid questions. One should note

that while these organizations are largely run by noble volunteer work, despite their humanitarian agendas, they need funding that generally comes from institutions with economic interests in the “helped” areas. In this way, NGOs can act as sanitized agents reproducing Western hegemonic power, turning into the missionaries of twenty-first-century neocolonialism. As Ngugi describes in his *Wizard of the Crow* (2006):

What private capital did then [during territorial colonization] it can do again: own and reshape the Third World in the image of the West without the slightest blot, blemish, or blotch. NGOs will do what the missionary charities did in the past. The world will no longer be composed of the outmoded twentieth-century divisions of East, West, and a directionless Third. The world will become one corporate globe divided into the incorporating and the incorporated. (746)

The narratives illustrated here also invite us to question our own subjective assessment of trafficked women’s needs. Often, the hand that tries to help can turn into that of a benevolent tyrant that hurts in trying to save. The popularity of celebrities involved in “third-world causes” becomes a case in point. Unwittingly, they sometimes create a spectacle of the appalling circumstances subaltern populations endure, thus reinforcing Western cultural hegemony. Audiences may rightfully wonder if what motivates the action is a genuine desire to overcome these women’s oppressive situations or an urge to generate a public stage to glorify their own humanitarian concerns (perhaps both?), especially considering that these celebrities profit from a capitalist system directly linked to the exploitation of the very people they wish to “save.” Probably unintentionally, they contribute to the perpetuation of the market-dominated ideology of consumption that correlates with postcolonial people’s exploitation and in turn allows sex trafficking to keep growing.

Granted, on an immediate level, the above-mentioned institutions and humanitarians do good. They raise awareness and money that can address the most tangible, pressing consequences of sex trafficking--and those actions are always welcomed by associations involved in providing first-hand aid to trafficked survivors. In the case of celebrities, for example, they bring attention to problems in the postcolonial world that news sources would probably disregard if it wasn't for their presence. I do not wish to suggest that all their altruistic actions are hypocritical or to deny that in the short term they help to relieve the problem. Instead, this work intends to open the spectrum of enquiry in all its complexities, highlight underlying tensions, and illuminate central causes enabling sex trafficking in order to address the long term effects as well. If, for example, we only focus on prosecuting recruiters and pimps (who often come from the same predatory environment as the victims) while ignoring root causes of the crime, beneficence can lose its potential for more radical aid. With this in mind, we can begin to interrogate patriarchal ideas of masculinity that accept sexual exploitation as natural or unavoidable, question economic practices that rely on subaltern (predominantly female) oppression, change patterns of consumption that ultimately destroy third-world populations' environments, and demand legislation to effectively punish not only procurers but also legitimized institutions that directly or indirectly profit from sex trafficking (Bales 238).¹⁰¹

In this way, this work has taken a rather controversial, perhaps less attractive side: looking at subaltern women with little or no agency and the central socioeconomic causes that enable and perpetuate their trafficking (in which those of us living in the global North

¹⁰¹ In *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (2000), Kevin Bales argues that "[n]ew or changed laws should address *conspiracy* to enslave or *profiting* from slavery, in the same way as homicides punish *conspiracy* to murder and don't restrict guilt to the person who pulls the trigger" (238). Bales further adds that nowadays "[t]he physical distance between slave and master is increasing, so laws must be crafted to guarantee that increased distance doesn't mean decreased responsibility" (238).

participate). I have argued throughout that, instead of placing the spotlight only on evil traffickers, thus becoming yet another messenger for rescue work and fundraising, we need to look at systemic causes underlying the proliferation of sex trafficking. While the immense satisfaction of being able to save “one” woman from daily torture and a predictable early death is undeniable, and those efforts should continue, this work invites reflection upon the majority of the other women who will stay trapped in the brothels and those who will continue to be enslaved by ruthless traffickers unless the circumstances that permit their exploitation begin to change. And while the task may look daunting, a fruitful place to start a productive dialogue in order to grapple with the complexities of subaltern female sex trafficking and spread active solidarity is the more democratic (less coercive) forum of the classroom, with the hope that the postcolonial stories examined inspire a much-needed ethical intervention.

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